

2012. The Congregation for Religious did not accept that Regional Vicars should be both regional councillors and major superiors. What's new in the 2012 Rule of Life: With its new title, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus presents itself as a family of religious and no longer of priests only; the vocabulary of the Heart of Jesus which had gone lost in the 1969 Rule of Life is recovered (the Heart of Jesus, the Word Incarnate); the chapter headings have been altered and the text is adapted to the new theological and charismatic vocabulary; in chapter 1, the Charism of the Family of Betharram, the dimension of consecration has been added to that of spirituality, community and mission; this chapter states in article 3 that the charism of St Michael Garicoits is for the laity too. Three new chapters have been almost completely rewritten: the one on the vows, the one on our service in the Church and the one on Betharramite formation; the authority of the Superior General is set out and enhanced; the Superior General and the Regional Superiors have each their vicars, that of the Regional Superior is known as the "First Regional Vicar"; the Regional Superior has a Regional Council composed of the Regional Vicars who

have a delegated authority in each vicariate. The council of Region no longer exists. The council of Congregation is maintained but has lost its power to reach decisions; finally for the General and Regional chapters participation is proportional (see articles 181 and 228).

The history of these 180 years of the existence of our Rule of Life is typified more by dynamism than by stability. In an ever changing world we are going through great changes, and our Rule of Life is more open than ever, more exposed than ever to adaptations to changing times and new spaces. May it be for the greater glory of God and for our sanctification!

Gaspar Fernández Pérez, scj

THE END

Happy Christmas
and Happy
New Year 2014



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NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE
NOTICIAS EN FAMILIA
NOTIZIE IN FAMIGLIA
FAMILY NEWS

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A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

The Child in the Manger is my Master

Celebrating Christmas allows us to contemplate the great mystery of the Incarnation, revealing to us how the God of Love stripped himself of all his riches to become a servant just like any of us. St Michael Garicoits contemplated in great depth the "God lost in love" as he is presented to us in the Epistle to the Philippians (2, 6-8); and passed on to us his own meditation in the Manifesto. Happily, our Lord, Jesus Christ humbled himself to taking our flesh, and the Word was made flesh (John 1, 14). Not only did he make us spiritual but also divine. That is what he deigned to make of us and what we have become in our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, my soul! What are you worth! Through the example of his life, through his spirit of love, he has convinced us of this fact. That is how he suffered the cold in the crib, humiliation, discomfort and repugnance for love of us. There is nothing better to instil us with love for him and to prove our generosity at his service. I can do all things in him who is my strength. (Phil. 4, 13).

When the contemplation is genuine, we draw fruits from it for our own lives. Our whole Christian life and religious life consists in becoming like our Master contemplated in his life style. Marvelling before the humility of Jesus

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St Michael Garicoits insists on the obedience when he speaks of the humility of the Incarnate Word and that of Christ's disciple. Obedient means to be reduced to nothing. The Incarnate Word was reduced to nothing. Not only in his divinity but also in his humanity. Taken on their own a man or a woman is nothing. To be nothing is very hard to contemplate whereas St Michael talks about Justice. We need to understand, know, recognize, admit and confess our nothingness and then cry out: "Help!"

in his Incarnation should inspire us with humility and fidelity in the face of our humiliations, like him. He, our Master, came among his own and his own did not receive him. At his birth, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger; later on he would kneel to wash the feet of his disciples; he suffered the humiliation of an inhuman passion. It is difficult to acquire humility without experiencing humiliations; we all think that we are the best until life makes us bite the dust, showing our weakness and in relegating us to the last place. Our Lord Jesus Christ warned us: take the lowest place; he took it. If we had a holy horror of ourselves we would find that it suits us very well. We wouldn't compare ourselves with others. No comparisons! Go to the last place! There is only one place! There is neither comparison nor choice! (DS 175-6)

A man and a woman derive their value from their union with God the Father and with all others considered as brothers and sisters. That is a fact! Anyone who thinks he is superior to others as if everything depended on him is living under an illusion for to believe that everything revolves round us is a mistake. It is unfortunate that, by acting like that, it is possible to do a lot of harm, preventing real growth, solidarity, friendliness and unity among mankind, as Father Garicoits explains.

What do we see in families, with the clergy and even in religious communities? Alas! All too often? Self centred interest, the end of everything. And then how everything is debased! Everything collapses – philosophy, theology, scenes and the most exalted ministries. Only self is visible, is object of consideration; result all those worldly considerations in which the common of mortals get lost. What a waste

11 – The last act of the history of our Rule of Life

Like all Religious Institutes our Congregation had to reflect on a new territorial organisation. The 1999 General Chapter had assembled the Provinces, Vice-Provinces and delegations in three Regions (St Michael Garicoits, Fr Auguste Etchecopar, and Blessed Miriam of Jesus Crucified) accompanied by three Coordinators who were members of the General Council.

To respond to the need for modifying the system of government of the Congregation, Fr Radaelli, Superior General, in 2003 set up a commission composed of Fathers Jacky Moura, Benat Oyhenart, Piero Felet and Gaspar Fernandez. As the commission advanced with its work, it became evident that it was the whole Rule of Life that needed to be revised so as to keep it in step with the theology of Religious Life post Vatican II and the reflexion on the charism since 1985, the year of the Conference in Betharram which took place to mark the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation.

At the 2005 General Chapter the commission presented the changes necessary for the government of the Congregation organised in Regions; this was approved by the Chapter and then by the Holy See. Furthermore the Chapter asked that this new organisation should be set up ad experimentum as from the Council of Congregation preceding the General Chapter of 2011 that is the Council of Congregation at Bangalore in 2007. Consequently on 25 October 2008 the Superior General, Father Gaspar Fernandez Perez pro-

mulgated the text of the Rule of Life of 2008 ad experimentum to function from 1st January 2009 to the General Chapter 2011.

By now the Commission had gained a new member- Father Bruno Ierullo and continued its work. It studied the weaknesses in the new system of government set in movement ad experimentum. It asked for the involvement of all the religious and all the communities in the revision of the Rule of Life. Consequently the text on which they were working was sent to all the communities. So, the community at La Colmena sent in suggestions some of which were included in the final text; the formation community at Adroque worked on the chapter on the vows; Father Laurent Bacho made several suggestions.

The General Chapter in Bethlehem in 2011 voted for the Rule of Life corrected by the Commission, which included not only the new system of government but also all the suggestions, quotations, terminology and other corrections.

On 1 July 2011 the Rule of Life voted by the General Chapter was submitted to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life who gave their reply on 17 September together with 23 observations. Corrections of these were presented on 18 November 2012. New further corrections were submitted to the Congregation for Religious on 15 February 2012. The Decree of final approval of the new version of the Rule of Life is dated 22 February

DECEMBER

14	Buon compleanno	F. Fiorenzo Trivelli
15	Happy birthday	Br. George Varghese Korandakkatte
16	Happy birthday	Br. Albert Sa-at Prathansantihong
17	Buon compleanno	P. Giuseppe Lietti
18	Buon compleanno	P. Giulio Forloni
19	5 años de profesión	Hno Victor Torales Martínez Hno Raúl Villalba Maylin
21	55 años de sacerdocio 5 años de profesión	P. Joachim Soares de Moreira Hno Glecimar Guilherme da Silva Hno Davi Aparecido da Silva Lara Hno Eudes Fernandes da Silva Hno Wagner Aparecido Ferreira
22	50 años de sacerdocio	P. Enrique Gavel
24	Happy birthday	Br. Gerard Sutherland
25	Feliz cumpleaños 55 anni di professione	P. Francisco Daleoso Fr. Fiorenzo Trivelli
27	Buon compleanno Happy birthday	P. Alessandro Paniga Fr. Chan John Kunu
28	Feliz cumpleaños Happy birthday	P. José Miguel Larrosa P. Hiran Thomas Klinboakaew
29	Happy birthday	Br. Davit Phithak Bi-Thuk
31	Joyeux anniversaire	P. Théophile Dégni N'Guessan

JANUARY 2014

1	Happy birthday	Fr. Valan Peter Kanagaraj Br. Peter Nonthaphat Mayoe
3	Feliz cumpleaños	P. Sergio Gouarnalusse
7	Feliz cumpleaños	Ho. Jesús Cano
8	Feliz cumpleaños	Ho. Teodoro Miguel
10	Happy birthday	Br. Yesudas Kuttappasseril
11	Buon compleanno 5 anos de sacerdocio	P. Alessandro Locatelli P. Mauro H. Ulrich de Oliveira
13	Buon compleanno	F. Angelo Sala

of time! What a spectacle we have become, thinking only of ourselves! We are putting man in God's place! Man is put in what should be God's place! We are materializing, we are humanizing instead of becoming more godlike, instead of being images for each other of our Lord Jesus Christ, who referred everything to his Father so that seeing each other we focus on God for his greater glory. (DS 83; MS 145).

The disciple should be humble like his Master, Jesus. A Master who taught the humility of the wheat seed in the earth, or of the measure of yeast in the dough, or of the treasure and the pearl, or of the last place at the banquet and of the humble who will be exalted. Only humility makes us capable of being the servants of others, makes us aware of their needs and urges us to get out of ourselves and help them to look for the help which they need.

St Michael Garicoits give the following description of the disciple: *Everyone is delighted to see someone who makes no exhibition and only appears unwillingly, discreetly; full of charity and patience, avoiding*

meddling in what doesn't concern him. A spirit quite the opposite, ready to interfere without mission, without grace, even without reflecting, ready to control everything and to criticise everything, trampling underfoot not only the rules of hospitality and Christian charity, but also the proprieties of common politeness, that is what is preventing the launching of the best works and the most important of foundations. (DS 188).

In the presence of the God of humility in the crib, let us ask for the gift of humility by praying with Psalm 131:

*O Lord, my heart is not proud
nor haughty my eyes.
I have not gone after things too great
nor marvels beyond me.
Truly I have set my soul in silence and peace.
As a child has rest in its mother's arms,
even so my soul.
O Israel, hope in the Lord,
both now and forever.*

Gaspar Fernández Pérez, SCJ



Saint Michael Garicoits wrote...

The Birth of Our Lord

A God has come down: he has become man and has assumed our nature.
A humiliated God: he has become victim and has assumed all our weaknesses.
A God in poverty: He has assumed our poverty and accepted the most despicable insults.
Behold a Child: This is the beginning of human life, wrapped in swaddling clothes. (M 543)

Assembly in Pau, 28 October 2013

DURING HIS VISIT TO THE FRENCH-SPANISH VICARIATE, FR GASPAR INVITED THE YOUNGEST RELIGIOUS STILL IN PASTORAL ACTIVITY TO AN ASSEMBLY IN PAU. WE WERE ABOUT 20 IN ALL INVITED TO START A DISCERNMENT ON THE FUTURE OF THE VICARIATE.

For the moment our Vicariate is composed of international communities thanks to the presence of five young religious from other Vicariates. It has the responsibility of holy places and of an important heritage for the Congregation. We are few in number living in the same structures.

To begin with we each replied to this question: "Bearing in mind my knowledge of the Vicariate and its life, what 2 suggestions do I make for the reorganisation of the Vicariate with realism for the next ten years?" After a time for personal reflection each one expressed his suggestions; this was followed by a synthesis of the suggestions and a debate.

- Reorganisation of the lives of the communities from the point of view of prayer, of community life with the laity, the parishes, other congregations, other institutes, together with the desire of accompanying the young people and vocation promotion.
- Suggestions for the reorganisation of communities, agreement among the religious beyond any support by outside experts.

Next we reflected on the reality of our situation with the help of 3 texts taken from Scripture (Ph 2,5-11), St Michael

(Rule of Life 15) and Pope Francis ("genuine power lies in service; meditation for 21 May 2013). This was a time for narratio fidei>

We then heard a talk by M. Joan-Grange, leader of the committee appointed for the future of the patrimony at Betharram. He made a distinction between buildings to be improved, the sanctuaries, buildings to be enhanced at Montaut, the farm, Arcos house and non-constructed sites, and property for which there could be partners, the Calvary, the Care Home for the Fathers and senior residents, and the Beautiful Branch College. Ever since the expulsion of the religious, this property has been looked after by the "Association La Pyreneenne". The question now is how the Congregation can recover the property, since from 2013 the religious are majority in the Association as well as on the Board. It was suggested to form a Financial Commission to advise the religious in caring for the property. This then is the question: How do we regard the future of this property and for what purpose?

After a friendly meal with the Pau Community we resumed our discussion with M. Joan-Grange. There were questions about the Community Notre Dame de Betharram (i.e. the monastery), the com-

Vicariate of Brazil

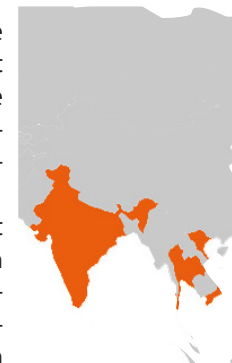
Vocation Promotion ► On 15-17 November, a meeting for vocation promotion was held in Paulinia. The topic was: "Vocation as a call from God and a human response". The meeting, attended by five young men, was chaired by Fr Aurelio Riva SCJ and organized by Fr Éder with brothers Davi Lara, Eudes, Wagner, and Jeferson, who are members of the team for vocation promotion of the Vicariate of Brazil. Leonardo, a young aspirant, was also present. Both the religious community and the parish community of Paulinia supported the initiative and this gave a boost to the



work of this team in discerning the will of God for each person.

Vicariate of India

Maria Kripa ► The Community has sent in this message: "We had various activities... Festivals celebrated in Maria Kripa ... that kept us vibrant such as Rosary month celebration, 'Karnataka Rajyothsava' (Formation of Karnataka State) celebration for the Kannada brothers and Diwali (festival of lights) celebration for the brothers from North India & Andhra. Our community is also grateful to the humble service and valuable presence of our friends from Italy and England".



Notice from the General Council

In the 25-26 November meeting of the General Council, the Superior General with the consent of his Council...

- admitted to the **final profession** **Bros Glecimar da Silva, Davi Lara da Silva, Eudes Fernandes da Silva** (Vicariate of Brazil), **Raúl Villalba Maylín, Víctor Manuel Torales Martínez** (Vicariate of Paraguay);
- presented the Deacon **Hyacinthe Ali Konan** (from the Vicariate of Ivory Coast) **to the priesthood**.

With the advice of his Council:

- approved the appointment of **Fr Raoul Segla Thibaut as Superior of the Community of Dabakala** (Vicariate of Ivory Coast);
- erected the novitiate of the Region Saint Michael Garicoits at Betharram, in the Notre-Dame community.

In memoriam

On November, 15, **Mrs. Rosangela**, Mr. Luigi Pirovano's wife, has gone to the Father's House. Mr Luigi Pirovano is a Batharramite lay associate and most valuable advisor in the administration of our Congregation. We entrust her to the Father and we pray for her and her loved ones.

On November 17th, **Mrs Maria Pasina**, the mother of Fr Raimondo Perlini scj of the community of Chiang Mai (Thailand), has gone to the Lord. We are close to Fr Raimondo and his family in this time of sorrow, and we raise our prayer to the Risen Lord for his mother.

Generalate House

USG ► The Union of Superiors General held its 82nd General Assembly in Rome from 27 to 29 November.

The story of three experiences provided the basis for reflections in different linguistic groups. The climax of the Assembly gathering - and our Superior General Fr Gaspar Fernandez Perez was also present - was the encounter with Pope Francis.

The Holy Father chose to meet with the Superiors for three hours, rather than the short encounter envisaged: no address was prepared in advance, but instead a long, colloquial and fraternal discussion took place, composed of questions and answers about different aspects of religious life today. Pope Francis enriched his dialogue with personal stories taken from his pastoral experience.

Vicariate of France-Spain

Praying with the body

► October 2013 - The Betharramite community of the Maison Saint-Michel at Pau organised a practical course to publicise a prayer style which is typically Indian. The feedback is quite encouraging. Please, keep up posted about the coming sessions.



Vicariate of Ivory Coast

Open day at Adiapodoumé ► Friday, October 15, 2013, National Day of Peace in Côte d'Ivoire: this was the day chosen by

the community of formation of Adiapodoumé to open the house doors to the public. With this initiative, the formators, intended not only to make the community known by relatives and friends of the young people in formation, but also to share with them some community activities.

Fr Sylvain Dansou, superior of the community of Adiapodoumé, in his welcome speech, explained to the 200-odd people present the meaning of this gathering.

These are the various events on this "Open Day": introduction of parents and friends of the brothers and of the different groups affiliated to the community (lay associates, Betharramite youth and children of St. Michael Garicoïts); a power point presentation about the daily life of the brothers, the celebration of the Eucharist; a talk about the history of the community and its projects for the future (Tshanfeto), the performance of St. Michael Garicoïts choir and a guided tour across the premises of the community and of the agricultural center of Tshanfeto, organized by Fr Laurent Bacho. It was a very enriching experience for everyone.

Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay

First Profession ► December 1st was a day of celebration for the Vicariate. In fact, in the chapel of the regional novitiate of Adrogué, Br Leandro Narduzzo made his first religious profession, surrounded by his family, his religious community, his friends and several faithful who came to support him in this important step for his life.

In the coming days Leandro will join the community of the regional Scholasticate of Belo Horizonte (Brazil), where he will begin his studies in theology.



Cloister and belfry of our house «Saint Michael» in Pau

community which receives the religious of the Vicariate and the Congregation visiting Betharram, but also the small groups and pilgrims on their way to Compostella. The vocation of the sanctuary is for pilgrimages and a centre of Spirituality. As from the month of December this community will receive the Regional novitiate.

Finally each one was invited to make two concrete suggestions for the foreseeable future. Here is a summary of the pooling of ideas:

- Pursue such meetings started in Pau.
- Following the celebrations of the 150th anniversary develop a spirituality in our missions.
- Revive the community in the Pays Basque which is the guardian of Ibarre and the Etchecopar House at Saint Palais.
- Set up a Financial Commission, to include experts.
- Pursue the pastoral care of the Youth.

Finally, we talked about planned restoration work to be carried out on St Michael's house in Pau. This will demand a heavy investment. We also noticed that in the course of our discussions we hardly ever

mentioned the College at Betharram. Partnership with the laity would deserve a fresh surge. We shall also have to keep an eye on the links between this type of Assembly and the General Assembly of the Vicariate as well as with the Council of Vicariate and the Regional Council.

Jean-Marie Ruspil, scj

Ph. 2, 5-11

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Rule of Life 15

The aim of our Society is not so much to preach, hear confessions or teach, etc., as to form men well disposed to perform these ministries worthily when the bishop or leader of the Society asks them. The object of the Society is then to train and form these ministers so perfectly that at the first signal of the will of their bishop or superior they can be worthily chosen to work for the salvation of souls.

POPE FRANCIS

Real power lies in service. This is an idea already expressed by Pope Francis on other occasions and taken up again on Tuesday 21 May during a Mass in the chapel at Domus Sanctae Marthae, during his commentary on the passage from the Gospel of St Mark (9, 30-37) which had been read during the celebration.

"In the Gospel account Jesus is crossing Galilee in company with his disciples and is talking to them about his passion: 'The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again'. He is speaking to his disciples – as the Pope explained – of what he was going to do, of his service, of his passion. But they didn't understand what he was talking about; they were on another level of understanding; they were debating among themselves, and the Lord knew well what they were discussing. 'What were you talking about on the way?' But they remained silent for they were ashamed. For on the way they were discussing who was the greatest among them". The struggle for power in the Church, said the Pope as he commented on the incident, was not something of today! It began there, with Jesus, where as he was talking about his passion and the disciples were wondering who was the most important among them. So much so that they deserved the "biggest portion" of what the Pope was comparing to a cake to be shared. That's not how things were to be done in the Church, said the Bishop of Rome. According to the Gospel "the struggle for power in the Church should not exist. Or if we like it should be a struggle for real power, that is the struggle which he undertook, namely service. As he did when he came, not to be served but to serve. And his service has been precisely the service of the Cross: he humbled himself to death and death on a cross, for our service, for our salvation."

In the Church there is no other way of advancing. "For the Christian," continued the Pope, "to advance, to progress, means to be humble. If we don't learn this Christian rule we shall never understand the real Christian message concerning power. To progress means to be always serving. In the Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius "wants us to ask our crucified Lord to give us the grace of humiliations: Lord, I want to be humbled so as to be more like you. This is what love is all about; this is what the power of service in the Church is all about; and our service of others in the footsteps of Jesus is all the better" said the Pope.

Christ as Pope Francis expresses it in his Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (18). The life of Christ, how he knows his Father and lives in total relationship with him, opens a new experience of humanity into which we are invited. To allow us to know it, to accept it and follow it, the Son of God took our flesh. Christian Faith is faith in the Incarnation of the Word made flesh and in the Resurrection of his body... faith



in a God who became of us and entered our history. Faith in the Son of God made man in Jesus of Nazareth doesn't separate us from reality, but allows us to accept its deepest meaning, to discover how much God loves this world which he constantly

invites towards himself. This engages the Christian to live more intensely his journey on this earth.

Indeed God loves us. Let's remember what our Founder says here: It so pleased God to be loved. God has no need of anything, he only asked to be loved. Let's be conquered by the God-of-Love. Let us love as he loves; let us love since he loves. Let's be united to Jesus: let us love

through him and with him."

Let us walk along this path to follow the Heart of Jesus and to be children of Saint Michael leading us with his example towards holiness.

Prayer

Father, who lavished upon humanity the riches of your love, take care of us, your pilgrim children, so that, by contemplating your mysterious plan of salvation, we may discover in the Face of your Son, who became one of us, the unveiled image of your infinite love.

My Lord, open our hearts so that we may recognize in each suffering human being your face and your presence. Help us to bear witness to the Gospel through a smile, a word, a sign of affection. Make us sympathetic towards people, and give us the strength to instill in them hope in your Son, Jesus, since in him only our lives find a sense of purpose and our death light.

Through the intercession of our Mother, Our Lady of Betharram, and our father St Michael Garicoits, grant us to marvel again at your love made flesh and guide us towards You and towards our brothers and sisters; help us commit ourselves more and more to serving them "with a great heart and a generous spirit". Amen.

of Father Alessandro Paniga, scj

op of our diocese and that in the depths of her heart she always longed for me to become a priest. She obtained that grace. As I was growing up in the seminary I gradually got to know St Michael and his spiritual doctrine which immediately fascinated me. Obedience to the Father's will and his love for mankind made the Heart of Christ the centre of my spiritual life. I have always tried to obey my superiors so as to do God's will, including in those difficult times when I was being asked to shoulder tasks and responsibilities for which I didn't always feel up to it. I tried as far as possible to be available, committed for the good of others, especially for the poor and those most in need of affection, attention and solidarity. In the different parishes where I was missioned (Monte Porzio, Catone, Albiate, Albavilla) I tried to do my best for the people by being close to their sick parents, and for the last few years I seem to have found my real vocation: be close to those needing help, care, respect and friendship.

St Michael stressed the importance of being close to the sick and the needy. Today I can say that I am very much on the same wave length. It is the school of the Incarnation of a God who became one of us to be with us and to save us. At Christmas I am very touched when I contemplate the generosity of a God who - as our Founder says -, just like a mother who sinks to the level of her child, "humbled himself and became a gift... dissolved in love -, and seeing the heart of man and his frail humanity, became incarnate so as to raise mankind to divine unity. The Word became Flesh. The Son of God became like one of us to make

us like him. The more God becomes humble the more he is powerful. Let's be full of amazement and gratitude so as to "become more generous."

How am I to put into practice what these words inspire me to do?

God's goodness for me is inviting me to deal with others with the same goodness. The idea that the heart of God is a bottomless pit full of goodness, ready to move our hearts with the plenitude of his mercy encourages me to be attentive, available, open, kind and gentle with the people I meet every day. I have learned what it means to be close to the people, to smile more and I see how this helps me to have a better relationship with them. I have come to realise this myself and I recommend it to everyone. A smile can bring relief to the weary, encourages those under trial, and it is a good remedy in times of sadness. As a child I was carefree, joyful, but with the passage of time, cares and worries made me too serious, even silent and melancholy. Today I seem to have recovered the serenity which I needed and still need to have, with God's help, better relationships with others.

What should I be particularly careful about? I need to have more trust in God, especially in times of fatigue and weaknesses. I would also like to be more fully aware that it is by having my eyes fixed on the Lord and on his love for me and for others, that a better world is possible, a world in which respect and humanity reign supreme. I would like to deepen my faith in the Incarnation of the Word; I would like to look at the world and its inhabitants with the eyes of Jesus

Yahweh, let me know my fate, how much longer I have to live. Show me just how frail I am. 'Look, you have given me but a hand's breadth or two of life, the length of my life is as nothing to you. Every human being that stands on earth is a mere puff of wind, every human being that walks only a shadow; a mere puff of wind is the wealth stored away -- no knowing who will profit from it.' So now, Lord, what am I to hope for? My hope is in you. (Psalm 39, 4 – 7)

He sent us his beloved Son. The Incarnation of the Son was the greatest gift God could give; it was the greatest proof of the Father's love. Not satisfied with loving from afar, from the highest heavens, he stooped down and sent his Son.

To bring men back to the memory and love of their Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ showed them the divinity made present in their humanity. Behold him present in the Crib and under the appearances of bread and wine in the Eucharist. (Titus 2, 12).

It is a manifestation offered to everyone, a school open to all who have eyes to see and ears to hear. What a school! What a teacher! What power and what gentleness in the lessons of the Crib and the Circumcision! What attraction to win the greatest number of sinners. (MS)

Narratio... What do these passages mean to me?

Psalm 39 (38) describes the interior struggle of someone in pain, who initially had promised to support the pain in silence, complaining to no one, not even to God. But he had been incapable of containing his anguish and so he pours out his suffering before the Lord. I am surprised to see that the victim doesn't ask God to be cured but rather asks when his life is going to end because he is aware of his fragility and how outmoded human life is: "Lord, let me know when my life will end; I shall know how fragile I am. Man is but a breath, so, according to the Psalmist, it would be senseless and stupid to depend on men. God alone can give meaning to a life which is expiring in a breath. In God alone can an anchor for salvation be found; "Now what more can I expect, Lord? All my hope is in you."

This psalm has been called "a simple prayer" by some; stripped of everything but rich in meaning. It is a psalm of suffering, but also one of hope in a God who is close to us for our salvation.

This psalm also echoes in my ministry here in Solbiate (CO) in the service of a hospice which takes in old and sick patients. Life is short, it is but a breath. I see it every day as I accompany these old people on the last stage of their life. It often happens that I can see in their eyes the fear and the sadness of a life drawing to a close and seemingly useless. I have often heard them complain of their suffering. They even sometimes attack God over it. They wonder when he is going to end their suffering, why they should have to suffer so much. There is no answer. There is no choice except to remain with them and help them to discover God who loves us in spite

of everything, a God in whom they can hope. Some express deep faith and support calmly their present situation certain in the knowledge that God will not abandon them. For me this is an important life giving lesson. Everybody is afraid of death. But I realise that as one approaches death God grants the grace to accept it serenely. Lord, all my hope is in you.

In the course of my mission I try to help people to understand the value of each person in God's sight, despite our fragility. What is man that you know him, Lord? (Ps 143.3) What is man that you should think of him, the son of man that you should care about him? (Ps 8, 5). The greatness of man resides in the gift, freely given. We receive our dignity from God who created us in his own image and likeness (Gen 1, 26). This explains why man is great. It is God's love which gives dignity to mankind. To help us understand that he really loves us God sent his Son among us. St Michael tells us: To help man to understand the memory and love of their Creator, Our Lord Jesus Christ shows them the divine nature really visible in his humanity. For our Founder the Incarnation is a school and the Schoolmaster is the Son of God Himself, a school which attracts by its power and gentleness. The association of these two vocations reminds me of the homily preached by Pope Pius XII, 6 July 1947 when he canonised our Founder and when he wanted to underline the strength of character of St Michael he compared him to "etched engraving" united to his gentleness in his dealings with others. That was how he applied to him the biblical expression: from the strong



Fr. Alessandro Paniga with Fr. Angelo Pessina (in the middle) and Fr. Angelo Petrelli (on the left) in 2007 in the Care Home «San Carlo» of the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God in Solbiate.

man came gentleness (Jg 14, 14), recalling Samson who had consumed honey found in a lion's carcass. From the strong man, St Michael, emerged his gentleness of character. From God comes the gentleness of his love. That's what I call the Incarnation: the power of God's love united to the gentleness of his mercy towards every one. So it is, according to St Michael, that the Incarnation is a manifestation for all of God's love which becomes a magnet attracting even the greatest of sinners. In his mission Pope Francis doesn't weary of telling the men and women of today in word and deed that God loves us; he is walking beside us, just like a companion on the route to lead us all to the father.

What aspects of these passages have made the greatest impression on the life of a Betharramite religious? The first I think is just my fragility. In the course of my life and even as a child I came face to face with several difficult situations: my father's illness, my brother's, the death of my young sister, the loss of our home in a fire; I have always been convinced of the uncertainty of life and I have always had a certain fear of death. Even though I have accompanied many people to their death, it is something which has filled me with an element of fear. Here in Solbiate I accompanied Fr Angelo Pessina, Fr Alessandro Del Grande, Fr Angelo Petrelli on the final stage of their life. I was favourably impressed by their

death. I would want to die like them, have somebody beside me to accompany me in those final moments. That is perhaps where my fear lies; to die on my own without somebody to accompany me at the final moment. As I assist the dying I realise how shaky life is; it escapes like a breath; on the other hand I have confidence in the Lord as I have seen it happen so often with those I have been assisting to their death.

This is why I want my fears to be replaced by my trust in God who loves me and is my hope and my salvation. I would dearly love to pass this hope on to the sick, the weary, the depressed who have abandoned all hope and whom I meet every Monday in the "S. Benedetto Clinic" d'Albese (Province of Como). There is something else which I note especially and which this passage inspires me is how good and generous God is to me. When I entered the seminary at the age of 11 I didn't know what I was doing. I probably owed my vocation principally to my mother, a bit like St Michael. It was thanks to his mother that he became what he was. When I was small I was very naughty. I did some awful things! So my mother had the bright idea of sending me to the seminary to improve my ways. To tell the truth in the beginning at the seminary I didn't know myself what I wanted, but there was one thing sure and certain I wanted to help others and give my life for the good of others. So it is my mother who deserves gratitude for my vocation. I know that she prayed a lot for me. When I was ordained priest she told me that she had called me Alessandro after the Bish-