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NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE
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FAMILY NEWS

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of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram

A WORD FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Listening to Saint Michael...

Another time [our Superior, Fr. Garicoits] came to tell us that we must have trust in God, since he loves to use little things to confound the great. Look, he said, Habakkuk is ploughing his field. God said: go to Babylon, carry your meal to Daniel. Habakkuk was troubled: but I have never been to Babylon, and I do not know Daniel... This good man, he imagined that this was impossible but it was so easy! God took him by the hair, down to the lions, and then took him back to his field and his plough. God took him by the hair, definitely not the most effective method! Just then tears came to the eyes of Fr. Superior.

Cachica Notebook, 4

Picture by Juan Vladimir Martinovitch, visual artist and art teacher
at the Betharramite College San José of Buenos Aires (Argentina)
Visit his Facebook page!



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The Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ

Today we make much use of the expression charism but in the days of St Michael it was unknown. On the other hand, in his writings we come across the expression "the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ" as well as others like "the spirit of the Sacred Heart" or "this divine spirit."

These are deeply held convictions about the Sacred Heart which are evident in his outward attitudes and actions. What an interior life! What an exterior life! "Try during this great feast of Pentecost which we are about to celebrate to be filled more and more with the Spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ which is essentially a spirit of charity" (Letter Nr. 88); "you have not applied yourself with enough courage and constancy to complete detachment. [...] Only attaching yourself to God's good pleasure, [...] not always without pain and tears, but in a disposition of loving all kinds of privations and sacrifices which are pleasing to God. [...] Oh my dear Sister with



what ardour I would wish you to have this spirit of Our Lord, an abundance of this spirit" (Letter Nr. 77); "I emphasise again, let Jesus always live in you. Nothing has any value to Jesus except doing God's Will; this was his food..." "[God's will which consists in] never doing his own will but doing always the will of God whatever it was, including very unpleasant things and dealing with very unpleasant people" (Letter Nr. 43 & 77). The person living in union with Jesus feels as he does and shows it in his exterior conduct.

St Michael Garicoits explains to us in what this spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ consists by taking that of Elias or John the Baptist as a "counterexam-

ple": "St John the Baptist had a spirit of rigour to reprimand sinners severely, as Elijah to punish and destroy: our Saviour had a spirit of gentleness, humility and generosity, not to punish and confound, but to attract to repentance and his imitation." (MS 351, M. 323). There you have very different ways of treating people who are still sinners. St John the Baptist and Elias make use of a severe condemnation; on the other hand our Lord uses gentleness, humility and understanding. The missionary disciples of Jesus should make use of the same methods. Severity aims at correcting sinners, at punishing them and showing them the error of their ways. With gentleness, humility

and understanding the disciples try to convince the people to renounce their sinful ways. Do penance and accept to follow Jesus to be with him and live like him.

With such behaviour "sinners and publicans approached Jesus to listen to him. As Jesus was dining at the house of Levi, some of the publicans and sinners drew near and dined with him and his disciples." (Mt. 9, 10)

"The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a



ram, a hurricane suddenly shook the thicket. The farmers leapt up: "Look! The Bishop's cross is on the ground!" – "No! But look! It's getting back up!". It couldn't be doubted. The cross, formerly installed by Léonard de Trapes, had just been knocked over by a gust of unexpected wind and in front of the mesmerised eyes of these simple men. And it just as quickly raised itself back up, surrounded by light. The noise of this event resounded quickly. The reapers of Montaut didn't need chaplains, who were absent anyway, to ring the bells. They (the Chaplains) learned of the news, in turn, but after more than 40 years of resisting heresy didn't let themselves pass on the news. The investigation began – it was long and painstaking.

The interrogations, retold, annoyed the farmers somewhat. But their common sense responses finally defeated the "Scholars' trap". The air of the Gave must be

particularly beneficial for spiritual health, as 200 years later a certain Bernadette Soubirous withstood even greater attack. Lacking any explanation, they had to admit defeat, and the miracle of the raised cross was recorded. Nowadays, one would without doubt test a "valid explanation", a hypothesis, anything, everything that is not at odds with a prior theory. Fine, as long as on the following day we give the same welcome to another theory which may destroy the first. For my own part, I prefer the witness of five pairs of good eyes who, during that day in September, saw the victorious cross on the hill.

Raymond Descomps scj (1916 - 2009)
in the bulletin «L'Écho de Bétharram» Nr. 274 (1973)

THE CALVARY OF BETHARRAM (1)

In the year 1616

Classed as a historic monument in 2002 with the Stations of the Cross, the Calvary of Betharram is a unique site that is above all a place of prayer which is very popular with pilgrims. Since 2007, our brothers in the Vicariate of France-Spain, several associations ("*Friends of the Sanctuaries of Betharram*", "*La Pyrénéenne*"), supported by many friends and benefactors and the town community of Lestelle are contributing to the preservation and restoration of this piece of the Congregation's heritage. This year the NEF magazine will be dedicated to its story that tells of course a tale of men and which, like the most beautiful stories, begins with a wonderful event, we could even say... a miracle.

In this year 1616, the Béarn sky lost its serenity. The Duke of Laforce, Governor of the country, raised some troops and maintained a climate of rebellion. The small valley of Betharram, on the other hand, prepared itself for some memorable days. Under the impetus of Pierre Geofroy, priest of Garaison, the Christian population of the valley had revived the old pilgrimage. All that was missing was the official consecration. In the month of July - we are told by Pierre de Marca, Historian and witness - Mgr Léonard de Trapes, Archbishop of Auch, came amongst several thousand of the faithful, to place a statue of the Virgin Mother on the Chapel altar. "Then", continued Marca, "he installed a cross on the hilltop to consecrate it to God's service". This hill belonged to the inhabitants of Lestelle.

The chaplains of Betharram, planning to extend the work of the pilgrimage, wished to purchase it. The donation was given to them for it, with the support of the brothers of Albret, the Barons of Coaraze, and the act was signed at Montaut

on the 19th August 1616. Betharram was ready to receive a new sign from the sky. September came to rest upon the hillside. The nights were already cool. Lime trees, birch trees and chestnut trees started to shake off their worn leaves in the thickets. The vast slopes of Montaut which follow the length of the Mousde were covered again in red fern.

Summer often finishes in our region with an abundance of sunshine. On the hill of Montaut (today known as the hill of Lasalle), five farmers prepared the stock of bedding for the Winter: fern, gorse and dried grass fell under the scythe. It was nice weather; no time was lost - the work progressed. Then came the break. They sat for a moment on the bare slope, facing the valley which looked over the hill of Betharram; a large cross had been raised for two months on top of the overhang above the River Gave. They got out their snacks, they got their breath back and they finished with a drink. Suddenly: "listen!", - "what?", "a storm?" - "There are no clouds". Over there, on the hill of Bethar-

drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by her works"(Mt. 11, 190).

It is with such behaviour that Jesus sees the conversion of Zaccheus, a rich man, leader of the Publicans who says to him: "*Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.*" (Luke 19, 8)

It is surprising to check and see how St Michael was able to understand the spirit of the Gospel; and there are many similarities with the style of Pope Francis and how he insists on mercy as the evangelical attitude of the missionary-disciples who must go out to meet mankind without passing judgment, pressure or condemnation but simply in the joy of discovering and getting to know Jesus. It is a joy for us too to see that the spirituality of St Michael is modern. It is by being aware of this spirit of Jesus that St Michael will instil it into the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. In doing this our holy Founder makes a distinction between the spirit in general which animates all congregations and the spirit which is characteristic of each one. "*It is to strive for the perfection of charity, that is, the union of our soul with God and with the neighbour for God's love.*" (MS 351, M 983) Here it is the spirit common to all the baptised, typical of baptismal life whether Christian, lay, consecrated, ministerial, married, or political.

The charism or particular spirit of

the Congregation includes the general spirit, the union of our soul with God and with our neighbour for the love of God plus what is characteristic of our life style. "*What is the proper spirit of our Society? The spirit of profound humility before God, of great gentleness (douceur) towards our neighbours, and of complete generosity (dévouement) towards each other. The spirit of our state is the spirit of Jesus Christ, of the Heart of Jesus so well revealed in these words: Ecce Venio.*" (MS, 352; M. 1134) It was always the custom to speak of the five virtues of the Sacred Heart; for the moment we have only mentioned four. Our Rule of Life number 60 tells us that what is typical of us is our filial obedience through love. It is part of the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In letter 163 to Father Barbe our Founder wrote: "*I can only thank the Lord for the goodwill of the Bishop of Buenos Aires. Here I am, my God! When will we understand that of all our duties, the first and most indispensable, and at the same time the most precious, is to present ourselves constantly to God and His representatives, while being aware of our nothingness, and surrendering ourselves to them, humble and devoted while each one of us says; 'Here I am!' O God, give us this spirit of your divine Son, Our Lord.*" (Letter 163)

Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj
Superior General

SNAPSHOTS OF BETHARRAMITE LIFE

I undersign and commit myself



At Bethlehem, at the community evening of the regional St. Michael Garicoïts novitiate on 2 January, the star appeared at the rose window in the chapel to illuminate the way for the three wise men and to indicate the direction of a new commitment for the four regional novices: Landry is to carry the message of Bethlehem to Yamoussoukro; Arnaud and Christian will leave for Bouar (via Abidjan) following Pope Francis in communicating the Good News of Peace and Mercy. Serge is to stay in the community of Bethlehem.

During the celebration of Vespers, before singing the Magnificat, the four novices committed themselves to living this second year of novitiate following the calling of their pathway. May the Lord accompany them in this new phase of their training where they can test out, within an apostolic community, the authenticity of what they have experienced over the past year in Bethlehem!

Picture taken from Facebook: "Noviciat Terre Sainte"

ture of love between the children of God themselves.

One of the fruits of mercy is forgiveness. We scheduled the Advent Retreat for 19 December 2015, on the theme "Be Merciful as Your Father in Heaven is Merciful". Then on 30 January 2016, "The Face of the God of Mercy according to St Michael Garicoïts" theme will be developed by a group of lay people, and on 23 April 2016 "Sacrament of Reconciliation as a Sacrament of the Mercy of God", who better than a priest can deal with this theme which invites us to a healing, as much for the benefit of the soul as of the body, and finally on 18 June 2016 "The Family: A Place to Test Mercy" presented by a group of lay people.

In the course of all our meetings, lay people can, if they so wish, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

On a personal level, the virtues of the Sacred Heart according to St Michael Garicoïts, love, obedience, kindness, availability and charity, help us to discover and to live the Love of God in our family life, in our professional circles, in our daily life wherever we are invited to practise these virtues despite difficulties, lack of understanding and often a moral harshness. With the teachings that we receive during our various meetings, we are walking in the footsteps of St Michael, often with tiny gestures, a smile in the face of conflict.



Witness of the “Né Mè” Fraternity

THE THREE GROUPS OF BETHARRAMITE LAY PEOPLE OF THE IVORY COAST FOUNDED THEIR ASSOCIATIONS ON AN ESSENTIAL VALUE, THAT OF FRATERNITY. OH, HOW PLEASANT IT IS, HOW SWEET IT IS FOR BROTHERS (AND SISTERS) TO LIVE TOGETHER! ... TO MEET UP TOGETHER REGULARLY, TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, TO MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER! THE “NÉ MÈ” FRATERNITY OF ADIAPODOUME GIVES WITNESS TO THAT IN THIS ARTICLE. AND THE CHARISM OF BETHARRAM? IS IT IN THE KINDNESS OF EXCHANGES? IN THE SPIRITUAL FOOD OFFERED AND DIGESTED? IN A HANDSHAKE AND A SHARED JOY?

On the 24th October 2015, the “Né Mè” (“Here I am”) Fraternity of Lay People, associated to the Community of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Adiopodoumé, started up their new Community year with a meeting. During the meeting, the theme and the programme for the year were presented. The theme was “To Rediscover and Live The Mercy of God through the Spiritual Doctrine of St Michael Garicoïts. Some sub-themes were left with groups to discuss during our various meetings.

Before these groups dealt with their themes, the Fraternity called upon Father Sylvain, the Superior of the Community, to present the year’s general theme clearly to us, focussing on MERCY. This presentation allowed us to make progress in our understanding of the theme and guided us in the sub-themes.

We live out different forms of solidarity: For example at our last meeting, we made donations in kind to Alix Kouakou and Félicien N’Guettia on the occasion of the birth of the baby. We visited Léontine Koffi, an infirm member of the Community who can no longer attend meetings, on 29 October 2015, to tell her we are more than a Community – we are a family in the



proper sense of the word. We also set up a prayer chain when Christian, Félicien’s other son, was admitted to intensive care. By the Grace of God, the child is feeling well today.

The second meeting took place on 28 November 2015; it was Brother Marie-Paulin Yarkaï who presented the theme to us – “What is Mercy?: a rereading of Pope Francis’ Bull on the aspect of Mercy”. The development of this theme allowed us to further improve our understanding of the terms of mercy, charity, forgiveness and justice; before coming to a conclusion about the vertical nature of God’s infinite love for humanity and the horizontal na-

Guided by Mary, Mother of Mercy

ON FRIDAY 1ST, JANUARY, 2016...



Salve, Mater Misericordiae!

With this invocation we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Roman Basilica dedicated to her under the title of Mother of God. It is the first line of an ancient hymn which we will sing at the conclusion of this Holy Eucharist. Composed by an unknown author, it has come down to us as a heartfelt prayer spontaneously rising up from the hearts of the faithful: “Hail Mother of mercy, Mother of God, Mother of forgiveness, Mother of hope, Mother of grace and Mother full of holy gladness”. In these few words we find a summary of the faith of generations of men and women who, with their eyes fixed firmly on the icon of the Blessed Virgin, have sought her intercession and consolation. It is most fitting that on this day we invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary above all as Mother of mercy. The door we have opened is, in fact, a Door of Mercy. Those who cross its threshold are called to enter into the merciful love of the Father with complete trust and freedom from fear; they can leave this Basilica knowing – truly knowing – that Mary is ever at their side. She is the Mother of mercy, because she bore in her womb the very Face of divine mercy, Jesus, Emmanuel, the Expectation of the nations, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5). The Son of God, made

incarnate for our salvation, has given us his Mother, who joins us on our pilgrimage through this life, so that we may never be left alone, especially at times of trouble and uncertainty. Mary is the Mother of God, she is the Mother of God who forgives, who bestows forgiveness, and so we can rightly call her Mother of forgiveness. This word – “forgiveness” – so misunderstood in today’s world, points to the new and original fruit of Christian faith. A person unable to forgive has not yet known the fullness of love. Only one who truly loves is able to forgive and forget. At the foot of the Cross, Mary sees her Son offer himself totally, showing us what it means to love as God loves. At that moment she heard Jesus utter words which probably reflected what he had learned from her as a child: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:24). At that moment, Mary became for all of us the Mother of forgiveness. Following Jesus’ example and by his grace, she herself could forgive those who killed her innocent Son. For us, Mary is an icon of how the Church must offer forgiveness to those who seek it. The Mother of forgiveness teaches the Church that the forgiveness granted on Golgotha knows no limits. Neither the law with its quibbles, nor the wisdom of this world with its distinctions, can hold it back.

The Church's forgiveness must be every bit as broad as that offered by Jesus on the Cross and by Mary at his feet. There is no other way. It is for this purpose that the Holy Spirit made the Apostles the effective ministers of forgiveness, so what was obtained by the death of Jesus may reach all men and women in every age (cf. Jn 20:19-23). The Marian hymn continues: "Mother of hope and Mother of grace, Mother of holy gladness". Hope, grace and holy gladness are all sisters: they are the gift of Christ; indeed, they are so many names written on his body. The gift that Mary bestows in offering us Jesus is the forgiveness which renews life, enables us once more to do God's will and fills us with true happiness. This grace frees the heart to look to the future with the joy born of hope. This is the teaching of the Psalm: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. [...] Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (51:10,12). The power of forgiveness is the true antidote to the sadness caused by resentment and vengeance. Forgiveness leads to joy and serenity because it frees the heart from thoughts of death, whereas resentment and vengeance trouble the

mind and wound the heart, robbing it of rest and peace. What horrible things are resentment and vengeance. Let us, then, pass through the Holy Door of Mercy knowing that at our side is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God, who intercedes for us. Let us allow her to lead us to the rediscovery of the beauty of an encounter with her Son Jesus. Let us open wide the doors of our heart to the joy of forgiveness, conscious that we have been given new confidence and hope, and thus make our daily lives a humble instrument of God's love. And with the love and affection of children, let us cry out to Our Lady as did the faithful people of God in Ephesus during the historic Council: "Holy Mother of God!" I invite you to repeat together this acclamation three times, aloud and with all your heart and with all your love: "Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God!"

Homily of the Holy Father, on Friday, 1st January 2016, for the holy mass and opening of the Holy Door at the Basilica St Mary Major, in Rome

BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE CONGREGATION

Region



France-Spain

Christmas celebrations ► For the celebrations of Christmas, Mary Mother of God and the Epiphany, the Parish of St Michael Garicoits at Mendelu, Spain, set up the traditional Living Nativity scenes. The catechism children and the confirmation boys and girls were part of this event. The theme for this Nativity scenes was inspired by the ordeal suffered by the immigrants who very often lose their life while crossing the sea in order to reach Europe. For this reason, the traditional crib of Bethlehem was replaced by a boat, in remembrance of all those who lost their lives at sea. In those days there was no room for Jesus and today there is no place for the immigrants.

Holy Land

Novitiate ► The novices of Bethlehem enjoyed the visit of Fr. Francesco Ra-daelli SCJ, Emeritus Superior General, for

a four day session on religious life and, particularly, on the history of the life of the Betharramite communities scattered throughout the world. Father Francesco took this opportunity to share his life experience.

Region



Paraguay

FVD Group ► Sunday, November 22 - As per tradition, a meeting was held in the San José College, Asunción, to elect the Superior and the Directors of the FVD Group for the years 2016-2018. During the Assembly the reports of the various committees were read out and the 60 members of the group assessed the work done so far. The last item on the agenda was the election of the new Council. Result of the ballot: Rodolfo Sánchez Kovacs, Superior; Lilian Codas de Santacruz, first councillor; Diego Jara Sosa, second councillor.

NOTICES FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Decisions of the Superior General & Council

- In the meeting of the General Council on December 15th, 2015, the Superior General with the advice of his Council approved the appointment of **Fr. Osmar Caceres Spaini as Superior of the community of Lambaré** (Vicariate of Paraguay), of **Fr. Alberto Zaracho Barrios as Superior of the community of Ciudad del Este** (Vicariate of Paraguay) and of **Fr. Glecimar Guilherme da Silva as Superior of the community of Belo Horizonte** (Vicariate of Brazil).
- He also approved the appointment of **Fr. Glecimar Guilherme da Silva as Master of the Scholastics of Fr. Auguste Etchécopar Region**.

finally told that without the help of the government there is nothing that can be done! Yet certain communities succeeded in organising themselves and put up resistance. You can see Jesus in these men and women persecuted, falsely condemned and thrown into prison, whose houses have been torched, whose cattle have been slain and who, themselves have sometimes been assassinated. Ezequiel, a five year old youngster was hit by a bullet meant for his uncle while they were cycling along the village road. This child was the first of a series of killings which took place in Santiago because of land. In some communities this climate of death has enhanced the longing to live

and they became an example for other communities. People have learned the art of organisation and the importance of caring for the forests and cooperatives. In the villages of Santiago the values of the Kingdom are present, especially for festivities forgotten by Western civilisation."

The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us" It is the strength of the Incarnation. Jesus became man; Jesus became poor. That is how he continues to show his love and to show us the merciful love of the Father and the presence of his Kingdom.

Sergio Gouarnalusse scj



Mrs Julia, who used to serve at soup runs at San Roque Parish in Santiago del Estero

Here I am before God and my brothers

ON THE 12 AND 18 DECEMBER 2015 OUR TWO YOUNG BROTHERS JUAN PABLO GARCIA MARTINEZ AND ALCIDES RAMON RIVEROS DIAZ FROM THE FATHER AUGUSTE ETCHECOPAR REGION MADE THEIR FINAL VOWS AS THEY PREPARED TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS FOLLOWING THE ROUTE TRACED OUT BY ST MICHAEL GARICOITS. THE PRECIOUS GIFT OF THEIR LIFE AND THEIR TOTAL DEVOTION REPRESENTS A MOMENT OF JOY AND GRATITUDE FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND FOR THE BETHARRAMITE FAMILY. THEIR GIFT IS THE FRUIT OF A LONG AND PATIENT PREPARATION.

"Here I am": "Ape aime"

I am happy with this short message to share my simple experience of God and the path which I have followed in the Betharram Congregation. When I was 18 years of age I felt God's call. It was then that I began to look for answers. I put to one side what I felt interiorly and began to plan my life according to my own projects. At the same time I continued working hard in the parish of San Francisco, Saverio de La Colmena under the care of the Betharramite Fathers. I was born in a simple and hard working family. My father Timoteo Rivero and my mother Silvina Diaz (deceased) showed me the way leading to real joy that is following Jesus. I am their 6th child. I have five older sisters and one young brother. In 2004, with the help of Father Tobia Sosio, I started discernment serious and in depth. I spent a lot of time in the parish and took part in the first vocational retreats and in those of the Congregation. The following year I was received as a postulant in the San Joaquin parish with Father Javier Irala and Deacon Daniel Pavon. This was a great experience; sharing community life



with them I felt God's call and our Human weakness which follows us throughout our whole life. Between 2006 and 2008 I was a postulant in the Formation Community at Puente Remanso (Paraguay) My formator was Father Mauro who helped me greatly. The years 2009–2010 were the time of my novitiate at Adrogué (Argentina) and were an important stage for me. The novitiate is a great grace. It is the experience of which St John speaks: "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we contemplated and what we touched with our hands". (1 John, 1) From 2011



18 December 2015, final profession of Br. Alcides Ramón Díaz (right) and first profession of Sergio Leiva (in the middle) with the Regional Superior, Fr. Gustavo Agín scj

like to stress the points which helped me to say a definitive “YES”; choosing religious life is an act of faith; what drives me, what attracts me in my decision is the faithfulness of God and his tender mercy. If anyone were to ask me what I am expecting I would say that I am not expecting anything extraordinary from belonging to Betharram; I simply want to be led by the Holy Spirit so that my gift bears fruit because only a generous gift of self for the Kingdom is worthy of belief. So too if one wants to manifest the movement of the Heart of Jesus, the Word Incarnate saying to his Father: “Behold here I am” and submitting to the will of his Father for the redemption of mankind.

Alcides Ramon Riveros Diaz scj

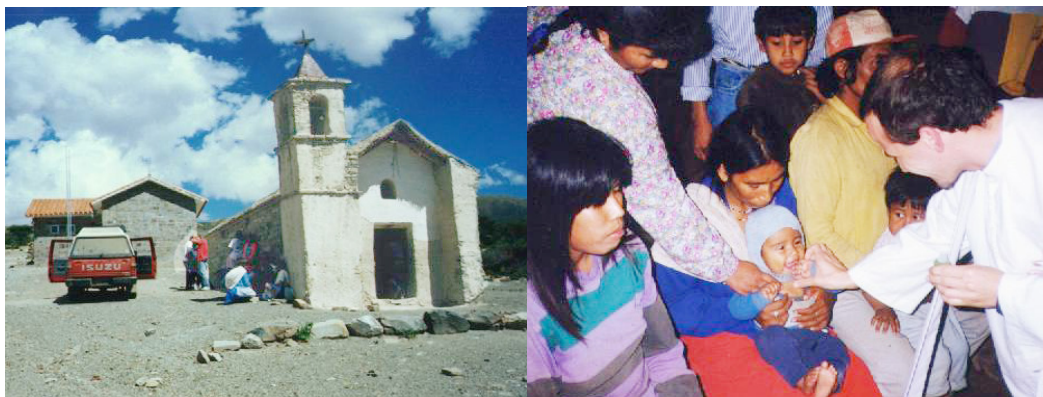
A pathway revealed

My name is Juan Pablo and I made my first vows in our little Betharramite family five years ago. It was the chapel of the Holy Family of Adrogué (Argentina), on December 12, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of Latin America. I remember with emotion the joy of this first profession: the festive atmosphere, the presence of the brothers and the people of the neighbourhood and my city, family, friends and the desire to respond generously to the pathway God put before me. These first vows have become final, that is, “for life” ... I was accompanied by the same if not greater joy, moved by the faces, the hopeful and affectionate glances and, and by the same desire - if not more so - to celebrate a profession that this time is per-



situation was rare, not so with the Creoles. They didn't know what to do. Finally they decided to go and report the incident to the police. A few days later the question of forgiveness arose in the Gospel but I didn't want them to feel accused. They spent a few days in discussion after which they decided to withdraw the complaint and give the culprit a second chance. In their culture discussions are always simple conversations. There is no violence – one of them speaks and after a moment of silence they have their answer. Not to talk about their relationship with nature: they know how to use it and how to care for it; it is really a source of suffering to see how the Creoles mismanage nature. Such are the values of the Kingdom! The individual, word, nature, respect, dialogue and the decision reached through dialogue. One can meet the living Christ on the suffering faces of these men and women who are often treated as animals of little importance.

Finally my experience with the peasants of Santiago del Estero: This was tough because of the political context of the situation. In this province of Argentina the rural population has been driven out of its land. These peasants were born here and have lived here for several generations, yet they have no rights of ownership. Production of soya, the laundering of dirty money, drug trafficking, are some of the reasons why the wooded properties of Santiago are tempting. It also explains why the peasants are threatened with being driven from their land and also why the Civil Servants do very well out of the situation. At Pellegrini where I spent 10 years on mission there were often land related conflicts. Entrepreneurs with armed bands would arrive, threaten the peasants while the police, justice and central government took the part of the wealthy. As for the communities their sole source of protection was to organise themselves, but this was never simple because local government depends largely on the state. They are



The other experience is about one I had with the aborigines of Argentina, a people known as the Matacos (meaning animals of little importance) and who describe themselves as Wichis (people). They are the most numerous of all the aborigines of Argentina; they live in the Chaco region in the north of Argentina and since they are living among the Creoles they are marginalised. This zone is rich in its many contrasts, but I must admit that its people are the most forgotten in our country. We used to go there several times a year to collaborate with the parish of Santa Victoria Este; the Wichi were generally of the Anglican Church, because the English were there already bringing the Gospel in the local language. Catholicism was regarded as the religion of the creoles. Despite that some of the tribes were Catholic, for example Santa Maria and Pozo del Toro. With the latter we formed cooperatives to sell the goods which we had made using the sacred wood known as "palo santo". In this way we were carrying

out our missionary mandate. We also sold honey. To reach where they lived was a tough exercise – the trip from Tartagal the most important town on the way could take from 8 to 15 hours! I learned a lot from these brothers; they lived the values of the Kingdom which our western societies have lost. For them people and speech are valuable. Whenever a Wichi came to the meeting he didn't just walk in but waited patiently to be called. Then the group would listen to him respectfully, discuss and give a response.

I still remember the day we launched the idea of the cooperative at the beginning of the mission. We thought that it wouldn't interest them because it was something of a novelty. After a week or so the tribal leader asked me questions about the idea because it had begun to interest them!

Another time, a member of the tribe who was alcoholic tried to abuse one of the women. In their tribe such a

petual. As with the first vows, and at each renewal, a sentence added to the formula provided by our Rule of Life expresses my experience in Betharram and the characteristic of the mission which the Lord entrusts to me: "let it be my God, that I give freely what I received freely: mercy and life." It is difficult to summarize the most significant moments of these nine years in formation (not counting the three years of initial discernment), the experience of this final step and how I am launched into the future ("Forward always !" as St. Michael encourages us), in my vocation and my mission. But perhaps these two words say everything: "mercy and life". We come for the first time, after meeting a reality or a person who will mark or forever enrich our being. Usually it is an item, a nuance, a gesture or a word that draws attention, leaving in our hearts a strong and indelible impression. "Mercy and Life" is the impression made on me when I met Betharram, an impression that time and the love of God (and the brothers) have made indelible. And it is through this that during the thirty day Spiritual Exercises in novitiate, I experienced the love of the Father in my limits and my infidelities (1st week), I answered "yes" to the call of his Son (2nd week), I suffered with Him (3rd week) and I experienced joy with Him (4th week). It was for this same "mercy and life" that in Brazil, where the scholastics of the Region Etchecopar study theology, I entered, with other brothers into Pastoral Work in the prisons of Belo Horizonte. At first it cost me dearly, Driven by fear, I even heard myself say, in the cell of a prisoner, that Pelé was a greater footballer than



12 December 2015, final profession of Br. Juan Pablo García Martínez (right) and first profession of Mariano Surace (left)

Messi and Maradona combined (!!). Joking aside, I understood on that occasion that the Good News of Jesus (God is love!) wanted to be present where so many people are like the deer that thirsts, in need of comfort and hope. It is in this spirit, with my brothers Alcides & Cristian, that we gave ourselves to this mission. "Mercy and Life" was also the object of the Spiritual Exercises in preparation for final vows. During these exercises, the Lord reminded me: "Never forget Juampi [the name my friends call me] my servant will not break the reed that bends, nor extinguish the flickering flame ... (Is 42.3). " Finally, I ask that anyone who reads this brief testimony will pray for me. A prayer, so that I can live faithfully (despite my limitations), as a dedicated Betharramite person, and, God willing, as a deacon and priest, the vocation and mission to which the Lord has called me.

Juan Pablo García Martínez, SCJ

PRACTISING THE RULE OF LIFE

Among the poor

SO MANY INJUSTICES ARE SUFFERED IN SILENCE AS ISOLATED PEOPLE TRY TO RESIST OPPRESSIVE SYSTEMS ACTING WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MAJORITY. THE BETHARRAMITE MISSION IS, BY NECESSITY, A DISCOVERY OF THE SUFFERING OF THIS WORLD, AND OF ITS HUMAN TREASURES. TO FOLLOW THE BETHARRAM RULE OF LIFE IS OFTEN IN THE FIRST PLACE TO LISTEN, TO OFFER THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS OF BETHARRAM IN COMPASSION AND SOLIDARITY AND BY THE MYSTERY AND MIRACLE OF GOD, TO KNOW HOW TO RECEIVE IT BACK THROUGH SHARING.

IN OVER 25 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS VOCATION AND MISSIONARY PRESENCE AMONG THE POOR, FATHER SERGIO GOUARNALUSSE SCJ KNEW AND ACCOMPANIED MANY "DISFIGURED" FACES.

As soon as I had made final profession I was entrusted with a pastoral mission in our Province-Vicariate which meant that I spent an important part of my life with the poor. When I paid a visit to our schools my major care was to see that the pupils could have contact with the poor. I believe

Article 115. With men and people affected by all kinds of injustices and poverty, we contemplate the disfigured face of Christ, who "put himself in the place of all victims." In all our works, we should make ourselves present to all people in their different forms of poverty.

Article 116. Presence among the poor presupposes an authentic discernment of our position in mission. It reflects on our personal and community lifestyle. It makes us always more attentive to the most deprived. Religious and the communities should take part in initiatives concerning human rights, protecting the environment, the quality of life, and the protection of the weakest.

that without such contact it is impossible to understand the Gospel. During those years I was called to fulfil my mission for the poor in Catamarca, in Santiago del Estero, the aborigines of Salta, the peasants of Tanja (Bolivia), as well as in other modest sectors in Santiago del

Estero, and in a school where the pupils were from the lowest social classes of Rosario. In every situation one comes across cases similar to what Pope Francis was talking about recently: "The Church is the servant of the Gospel", she is servant of the Kingdom. God is to be found among the poor and shows himself through them. As mystics of the Incarnation we are called to

recognise Him in the person of the poor. As a commentary of articles 115 & 116 of our Rule of life I will simply share three experiences.

The first is with peasants in Bolivia. Together Argentines, Paraguayans and Brazilians, we went to a parish in Tanja where there was no priest. In January we organised courses for lay ministry and we celebrated Holy Week with each of the Catholic communities. They were lively communities where faith and life were always one. When the courses were announced we got ready to receive about 60 delegates from the different communities. These arrived on foot, walking about 8 hours on mountain paths and at altitudes between 2 800 metres and 4 200. At Yanchara, the parish base, people got ready to receive all the



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delegates, and give them food and drink. I was amazed and edified by their longing for formation, by the numbers of those coming for the course, and by the ease whereby they applied the Gospel to their own lives. They attached importance to participation, they discussed and took decisions in community. They were equally aware of their weaknesses. I remember a conversation about the fact that alcohol was a cause of marginalisation. Their willingness to work is amazing among these people; they risk life and limb to go and sell their produce in the fair in Tanja or Villazone, 50km away covering the distance in 2 to 4 hours. They practise the values of the Kingdom: community, work, solidarity, sharing, dialogue, and faith linked to their life.

