

## In this issue

Go out “without delay”: a typical trait of the loving heart p. 1

Angelus, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 p. 4

An important step towards beatification p. 5

Care of the Creation p. 7

But the Lord had other plans... p. 9

Bird’s eye view of the congregation p. 12

Notices from the General Council p. 16

† Fr. Davide Villa scj p. 17

Father Etchecopar... p. 18

From heart to heart: Fr. Stervin scj p. 21

Feast of all saints... p. 24

## A word from the Superior General

### Go out “without delay”: a typical trait of the loving heart

*“With the law of love engraved in their hearts, the just see and taste good; He walks admirably and does much more than all external laws prescribe”.*  
(DS § 134)

Dear Betharramites,

In October just gone, I had expected to complete my Official Visitation of the Vicariate of Italy, which I had suspended in March due to the pandemic. Enthusiastic, but cautious, I went among the communities of Tuscany and Parma until as far as Albiate, in Lombardy. At that point, the visit was derailed by ‘masks and social distancing’. In this house several elderly religious live, who with a brave naivety still do everything they can to give a ministerial service, even if the situation deems this unwise.

Evening fell when I was about to concelebrate Mass with one of them, the eldest. He was a pleasant 93-year-old father named Andrea (from the Greek *andros*: “man”). I followed his celebration step by step, in which he was aided by a 73-year-old volunteer altar server: Fr Tarcisio! (a happy Eucharistic concurrence).

After the celebration, Father Andrea smiling broadly came over to tell me something in private. He wanted to thank me for sending him a small note of congratulations on his 70 years as a priest. He spoke to me, his voice both hoarse

and wheezy: "Father: you surprised me with your message!" He then immediately began to illustrate his surprise with a fascinating story. Our meeting seemed to evoke memories for him of other South American religious with whom he lived in his early years, as a missionary in Brazil. He asked me: "Did you know Father Lasuen?" "Sure," I told him, "I was his co-worker in recent years in Adrogué and Belo Horizonte." "In my day," said Father Andrea "he was the Vice-Provincial and one morning he called me on the phone at the Conceição boarding school in Rio Verde (Brazil) to tell me: 'You must pack your suitcase immediately because this afternoon at 2:30 p.m. you are moving to your new post: Passa Quatro' (about 90 km from there). I was very surprised and immediately went to the patio where I looked after the children. There a few approached me and, seeing me a bit quiet, one of them -called Antonio Scarpa<sup>1</sup>- said to me: 'Why don't you play with us today?' '... Then I told them that this would be the last morning I would spend with them. Their eyes widened; they hugged me and tears ran down their cheeks. Then I went to my room and got ready for the journey. The driver was not long in arriving and by the afternoon I was at the new residence.

But that was not all. The next day people came searching for a priest who would give extreme unction to a man who was dying in a remote mountain

village. They asked who dared volunteer, because it was quite some distance away. So as I was the youngest I volunteered and went on horseback with a guide... on a four hour journey!

As we approached a river crossing, I got off my horse and tethered it, then crossed on an unstable raft. When I got to the other side of the river I found a hut and inside it, a slave (sic!). Lying on his bed, the patient had a ring in his nose and earrings in his ears. He was waiting for me in his utter poverty. He told me: "sit down" and presented me with an upturned wooden fruit crate as a chair. After receiving the sacrament and viaticum, he said goodbye to me very gratefully and in peace. But... now we had to go back. Four hours on horseback to get to the community and there the Superior was waiting for me again. [Fr Enrique Lasuen was also an accomplished horse rider back in Adrogué, and used to ride Gaucho and Poroto (literally "Bean"), the two horses of the community. Born on the Argentine Pampas he was raised as a shepherd boy, going by foot or horseback with the help of his sheepdogs].

'How did it go?' the Superior asked the missionary. 'It went well,' said the young Fr. Andrea, 'but I confess that after eight hours in the saddle, I feel totally wrecked' (his back was in agony after the 8-hr ride). 'Well, I'm going propose a remedy,' he said. 'Take a good bath sitting down.' 'How to do it?' he asked him, 'Fill a large basin, add three handfuls of salt to the hot water

1) Now, Fr Scarpa scj, community of Belo Horizonte

and sit there, you will see what will happen'... Father Andrea says: "In half an hour that remedy had cured me completely".



As you can imagine, at this point I was lost in admiration, captivated by an experience of more than 65 years ago told to me like this: between smiles. A quiet emotion overwhelmed me, because Father Andrea had cited in his story dear people and remote places that I had known. His evocation had allowed me to reach a Betharram that, despite everything, is still alive, not only in the memory of a past interwoven with heroic acts, but also in a passionate present, which refuses to die, and in which is repeated continuously: obedience out of love, and brotherhood towards all. I rediscovered in a simple story that we are all brothers. Such different people, the common charism managed to bring together: foreigners and locals; free and slaves, those of the city and those of the periphery. All brothers!

I also felt the contrast with brothers who tend to put many conditions on obeying without reservations, going on mission, leaving their place of comfort, taking on unrewarding tasks, or even welcoming those who are different...

I said to myself: a religious family that does not know how to sacrifice, to

witness to its vocation in its mission, is dying. A Betharram in which there is no obedience and where disunity is manifest, hastens its own demise. For Saint Michael "*the spirit of insubordination*" was always the most lethal virus.

How many obstacles do those in charge of

animating the congregation still face due to lack of "*religious spirit*"?

Having listened to Father Andrea, I felt the inner strength coming back to me (always threatened by the burden of authority). Admired by that 93-year-old missionary, that "*great little man before me*", I recalled in an instant that spirit that encouraged and still encourages so many Betharram missionaries to "*go out without delay*". Many of them live among us today!

Then I approached and said in his ear, in a loud and resounding voice: May I take a picture of you? He accepted without hesitation. When I showed it to him he liked it and told me mischievously: "*This is better than the last one you had taken.*" What he probably didn't know is that more than the sweet memory of his photo, what I really wanted was to snatch a piece of cake from his Betharramite heart.

**Fr. Gustavo scj**  
Superior General

## Angelus, Solemnity of all saints

Saint Peter's Square, Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020

[...]The Saints and Blessed are the most authoritative witnesses of Christian hope, because they lived it fully in their lives, amidst joys and sufferings, putting into practice the Beatitudes that Jesus preached and which resound in the Liturgy today (cf. Mt 5:1-12a). The evangelical Beatitudes, in fact, are the path to holiness.

In the third Beatitude, Jesus states: "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*" (v. 5). Brothers and sisters, meekness! Meekness is characteristic of Jesus, who said of himself: "*Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart*" (Mt 11:29). The meek are those who know how to control themselves, who leave space for others, who listen to them and respect their way of living, their needs and their requests. They do not intend to overwhelm or diminish the other, they do not want to tower over or dominate everything, nor impose their ideas or their own interests to the detriment of others. These people, unappreciated by the worldly mentality, are, instead, precious in the eyes of God who gives them the promised land as an inheritance, that is, eternal life. This



beatitude too begins here below and will be fulfilled in Heaven, in Christ. Meekness. At this moment in life, even in the world, where there is much aggressiveness..., in everyday life as well, the first thing that comes out of us is aggression, defensiveness. We need meekness to move forward on the path of holiness. To listen, to respect, not to attack: meekness.

Dear brothers and sisters, choosing purity, meekness and mercy; choosing to entrust oneself to the Lord in poverty of spirit and in affliction; dedicating oneself to justice and peace — all this means going against the current in respect to this world's mindset, in respect to the culture of possession, of meaningless fun, of arrogance against the weakest. This evangelical path was trodden by the Saints and Blessed.

[...]

Each one of us can do it, take this path: meekness, meekness, please, and we will head toward holiness. ●●●

## An important step towards beatification

In the first days of October – taking advantage of a break granted by this tiresome virus – the planned journey to Betharram could finally take place<sup>1</sup>, to visit the most significant places in the life of the Servant of God, Father Auguste Etchecopar, and to record testimonies on the upholding of his reputation of holiness, after the last observation done during the apostolic process.

The Diocese of Bayonne, on the initiative of the postulation team, had thus officially opened the supplementary enquiry on 7th October 2020, while the beatification process began again after a certain time, regardless of the reasons for this interlude.

In fact, the Church intends to offer to the veneration of the faithful the servants of God who have by their lives traced a sign both lasting through time and maintained by the genuine sentiments of the faithful who had the ability to recognise the fragrance of the Lord in the lives of the saints, anticipating in a way the impact of the rite of beatification.

On behalf of the Bishop of Bayonne, the canon Merly, judicial vicar of the diocese who presides over the inquiry, first of all visited the tomb of the servant of God. This isn't easily accessible. It's a simple, stone tomb on the floor of the little neo-gothic chapel at the end



*Don Ettore Capra*  
Postulator of the cause

of the way of suffering of the beautiful stations of the cross which go up from the sanctuary at Betharram. However, the canon would be able to observe that, on this tomb, the faithful still leave flowers, requests for help and thanks for favours received.

Then the religious of Betharram and the faithful lay-people were questioned by the investigating judge, assisted by the Promoter of Justice, Monsignor Corradini, who had come directly from Rome and whose tasks consisted of preparing questions to ask the witnesses and overseeing the compliance of the proceedings to the practices of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. The statements, slipped into envelopes and sealed, will be sent to Rome, together with unprompted statements by people who wanted to contribute to provide a new perspective on the exemplary man that Father Etchecopar was.

Accompanied by Father Jean-Dominique Delgue SCJ, Procurator of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, His Excellence the Promoter of Justice also went to

<sup>1</sup>) Originally planned in March 2020



Saint-Palais, the town where the servant of God was born and spent the years of his youth, teaching in the Episcopal school, while he prepared himself for the priesthood.

There, he visited the birthplace which for almost 100 years has welcomed the religious community of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The latter, and Mrs Catherine Fouchet, were also questioned about the reputation of holiness of the servant of God.

The investigating judge enquired about other details in other places, as the servant of God did not limit himself to carrying out his vocation in France. Indeed, he did not hesitate to cross the Atlantic in the trail of many of his emigrant compatriots to distant Argentina and he also returned several times to the Holy Land and to Rome, leaving a permanent image of holiness in these countries.

His person and his reputation

are still present today in the country where the sons of St Michael Garicoits continue the vocation of that Congregation, which owes a stable structure, papal endorsement of statutes and the opening of several houses to this servant of God and to his long years where he was the superior general.

It is necessary for now to collect the signs of veneration and, without forgetting to offer some images of the servant of God, to respond to the desire to know his life and works in more detail, whether through a documented biography or through other suitable means.

May renewed courage and increased determination guide therefore our steps towards the glorification on Earth of that beautiful soul who, we hope, is already rewarded in Heaven. ●●●

## Care of Creation

Last October 10th, the Betharramite community of Chomtong in Thailand organized a day around the encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato si'*.

Five of our brothers worked together : Fr. Tidkham Jailertrit scj., Fr. Arun Kano scj., Fr. Monkhon Charoentham scj., Fr. Jiraphat Raksihao scj. and Fr. John Bosco Sommai Sopa-Opaad scj.

The idea of such a day was born during a reflection which took place between the members of the vicariate and those of the Betharram Foundation in Thailand. The various exchanges allowed to define the following targets:

1. To find a better use for a land of Betharram unexploited until now.
2. To act together, with one hand, between members of the Thai vicariate and parishioners, and collaborate with each other.
3. To answer the call of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'* : to co-



operate to protect and preserve environment, nature.

From this was born this invitation addressed to the parishioners and young people to know the encyclical better, to deepen the themes developed and to accomplish a concrete gesture together. Around this beautiful program, our Fathers gathered three Salesian Sisters and forty-five young girls trained by the Sisters of Charity, fifteen boys from our Maepon center, twenty teenagers, girls and boys, from the "Mission of love" missionary center, a mission of our Chomtong parish, twenty parishioners and workers. A total of around



a hundred people, young and less young, answered the call.

As a summit to this day dedicated to ecological spirituality, every one got down to work, took spades and planted 570 banana-trees on this bare land of the foundation.

The parishes where Fr. Tidkham and Fr. Pitak are ministering must also be thanked, as they generously offered the young plants.

From the start, Fr. Jiraphat explained the message of *Laudato si'* of our Pope Francis, pointing out the essential ideas. Then Fr. Mongkhon, responsible of the Betharram foundation, invited the participants to a time of celebration and sharing by prayer, reading of the Gospel, a homily about how to care for nature,



the prayer of the faithful about *Laudato si'*. At last, the planting of the 570 banana-trees was followed by a fraternal frugal picnic.

The event aroused great interest, all generations together, and gave the opportunity to understand how « *taking care of our common house* » was important.

Indeed, the message is more specially addressed to the young people. May them cultivate, in themselves and around them, this attention for our environment, taking care of the common House God offered to mankind and for which mankind must feel responsible. ●●●

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## But the Lord had other plans...

I was born on 11 April 1986 in Sicogi in Yopougon (District of Abidjan), the second child and first boy to a family of six children. I followed the compulsory school and student course there until I obtained the Senior Technician Certificate in Finance and Accounting. After that I started courses in engineering, in Auditing and Management Accounting. During this time, I was offered an internship by the Ivorian Electricity Company (CIE), with great professional career prospects in view. For me it was all clear; I would have had a bright professional future, especially as I continued to pursue courses in becoming an accountant. But the Lord had other plans for my life. Even though I no longer expected it, the question of my vocation resurfaced. With the help of a catholic uncle, I began to take time out for retreats and at the same time I was accompanied by one of the vicars of the cathedral parish to which I belong. After a year of discernment, this vicar suggested that I join the diocese. It is true that I felt the call of the Lord but the idea of joining the diocese did not mean much to me. Why? Because I certainly felt a call, but not that of diocesan life. At that time, I knew nothing about religious life in all honesty. It took divine intervention through my uncle, who spoke to me about the religious life and suggested that I go to



**Br. Serge Pacôme  
Appaouh**  
*Community of Pistoia*

a community of the Beatitudes. I went there. I even had a discussion with the vocations officer (the superior of the community at the time: Fr. Epiphane) who some weeks later, suggested that I start a vocational experience with them; a proposal I declined even though I liked them.

One day I was having a conversation with my cousin Fr. Aaron (Bondoukou diocese), who had just finished his theological training, and he told me lots of good things about a community called Bétharram, where he had undertaken philosophical training. My uncle who was with us just joined in. He said he knew one of the fathers: the late Father Omer scj, who was at that time in charge of vocations. It all started from there. So I joined Father Omer and we had a meeting. I was struck by one thing that for me was very significant. He presented himself not as a priest, but as a "religious of Betharram", even though I did not know what he meant at the time. Having said that, I was struck by his presentation.

My desire to become a religious in the family of Bétharram started from this meeting. Indeed, Father Omer invited me to come and get my own idea of Betharramite life by participating in the camp for aspirants, which I did without hesitation. My inclination for the family of St. Michael started in this camp, when I began to read a short booklet which dealt with the life of the Basque saint. I was touched to see such humility, such great love for the Lord. It was seeing a young man capable of doing domestic work and enduring all the frustrations associated with such tasks with the sole desire to respond to the Lord's call, that shook me up. A few days later, as we were returning to Adiapodoume for the celebration of Our Lady of Betharram, how great was my surprise, as I could not distinguish the priests from the religious, all were doing the dishes and conversing with us. It was something that I had never seen, even though I was very close to the diocesan fathers, obviously not wanting to create needless differences. The Betharramite lifestyle was new to me, and that's what mattered to me.

After my personal meeting with the late Father Omer, I was introduced to Father Sylvain Dansou scj who worked alongside me and facilitated my admission to the pre-postulate on 10 October 2011. Now I have the opportunity to say a big thank you. Because, for my first steps in religious life, he not only took care of my formation,

but was more like a big brother. This allowed me to progress serenely with trust in the Lord. After a great year of pre-postulancy, I was admitted to the postulate where I followed the philosophy courses at the Major Seminary of Abadjin-Kouté from 2012 to 2014. These years were full of great encounters and unforgettable experiences.

From September to December 2014, at the request of the congregation, I did an internship with children in difficulty in the "Akwaba Centre" run by the Christian Brothers. Immediately after that, from 2014 to 2016, I began the canonical novitiate in Bethlehem (the Holy Land), where I also did my second year. Then on 8 September in the parish of St Bernard, I made my first religious profession. This opened the doors to the scholasticate; three years (2016 - 2019) of theological training at the Catholic University of West Africa (UCAO). After having obtained the theological baccalaureate, I was sent to the community of Pistoia (Italy) for preparation for final profession. There, I had to integrate myself culturally, that is to say, learn the Italian language as best I could, in order to respond appropriately to the mission. This enabled me to lend a hand in the parish with the fathers of the community and to render services to the diocesan Caritas (Mensa, Emporio, Centro Mimmo). My time volunteering at Caritas was a great experience in that it allowed me to experience poverty in another

form, through witnessing human limitations and fragilities.

At the end of these years of formation, I understood that the particular devotion that our congregation has for the Sacred Heart is fundamental for a serene *sequela Christi*. Where else can we find the resources to live with others, if not in the very heart of God? I am called, like every Christian, to welcome the love of God. If I am lacking this love, nothing will be possible. And as our founder Saint Michel GARICOITS tells us, the love of God can only be understood and lived in Christ Jesus: He is the magnet, the model and the means which make it possible to achieve Divine love. This entire spiritual journey was only possible through my formators, brothers, people I met here and there, who welcomed me and helped me question my faith, my life. I want

to say a big thank you to them.

While I have just recently made my final profession in the hands of our Superior General the Most Reverend Father Gustavo Agín, with two members of his Council, I would like to thank the Lord for the gift of life. Deep down, I don't feel deserving of his grace. This profession is not mine but His. It will have meaning for me, if the Lord helps me to live it with the grace that he will communicate to me. Because the more I advance the more I realize that without Him I am absolutely nothing: *"Man is like a breath. His days are like a passing shadow."* May the intercession of the Virgin Mary help me to live my faith and to try to be, as best I can, a witness of the love of God where the Lord wills. ●●●





## CONGREGATION

**Vietnam** • "Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with you". As the month of October is dedicated to the Rosary, the community of Vietnam visit different families to pray the rosary with them and share about Our Lady of Betharram.



After the Rosary, the young brothers take turn in giving a short reflection about our Mother of Betharram, in Vietnamese. The families are very welcoming and they are very happy to hear about Our Lady of Betharram. They all show a delightful feeling of admiration for the legend and the Statue.

At the end of September, the community, along with a charity group, paid a visit to an orphanage run by the Lovers of the Holy Cross Sisters, Vietnam. Fr Shamon scj celebrated the Holy Eucharist and then he presented a few gifts to the children and gave a personal

blessing to all those who were present. The visit was ended with a cultura programme and a fellowship meal with the children.



## REGION SAINT MICHAEL GARICOÏTS

FRANCE <sup>SPAIN</sup>  
IVORY COAST  
ITALY <sup>CENTRAL AFRICA</sup>  
HOLY LAND

### France-Spain

• On Monday 26 October the community of Pibrac experienced a moment of meditation at the Abbey of *Notre-Dame du Désert*... This abbey of Trappist monks (reduced to seven elderly religious and now sent to different part of the world, France, Peru and Norway), was closed down 3 October and has now become the "Village of Francis".

The "Village of Francis" will gradually welcome up to 120 people: homeless, former prostitutes, former prisoners, migrants..., and will continue to offer space for spiritual exercises, retreat days, just as when the Monks were there.



The community of Pibrac spent time in personal reflection, in sharing about the editorial by Fr. Gustavo Agín scj (NEF of October), in updating the community project and in revising the accounts. Br Aurélien scj and Br Salomon scj, from Ivory Coast, newly temporary professed, have been in Pibrac for a month now and they are attending the theological courses in the "Saint-Cyprien" Interdiocesan Major Seminary and the courses of the Catholic Institute in Toulouse.

- On October 28th, on the feast of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude, was arranged a gathering of the young religious of the Vicariate of France-Spain (Fr. Sylvain Dansou scj, Br. Salomon scj, Br. Aurélien scj, Fr. Hervé Kouamé scj, Br. Landry scj, Fr. François Tohonon scj, Fr. Gerard Zugarramurdi scj and Fr. Habib Yelouwassi scj), while the pandemic prevented those from the Vicariate of Italy from joining us. It was a time of prayer, with readings of some articles of our Rule of Life, to remind us of our Betharramite vocation and its mission in the world.



Then we celebrated the Eucharist in the chapel of St Michael Garicoits with the faithful who are used to attending our daily Eucharist.

In the afternoon we had the opportunity to share with Louis and Camille, who have just been united by the sacred bond of marriage a couple of weeks ago in Pibrac, about the experience of young people, their expectations, the prospects for the future.

Finally we developed our year program.

May the Lord give everyone the audacity to go out and meet young people in a new dynamic of the Here I am for the salvation of all.

## Ivory Coast



- On Friday 16 October, during a solemn Eucharistic concelebration, the community of Adiopodoumé officially began the 2020-2021 community year.

Before the celebration, during a community meeting different aspects of the new year were taken into consid-

eration: orientations and perspectives; economic situation, assignment of tasks and responsibilities. After this, during the Eucharistic celebration, the pre-postulants, Landry, Constant, Jean William, Salomon René, and the postulants Célestin, Aimé and Aristide were welcomed. Always, forward!



### REGION FR. AUGUSTE ETCHECOPAR

ARGENTINA URUGUAY  
PARAGUAY BRAZIL

- The Region decided in recent times to divide its work into areas that each Betharramite, by inclination, could choose and work for, with the desire that a discernment of our life and style could nourish the whole region from what is proper to each area. These areas are: «Parishes», «Peripheries and Sufferers», «Spirituality and Formation», and «Education». This time we speak about the Regional Team for Spirituality and Formation. Among the laypeople there are: Mali (Paraguay, FVD Group), Gabriel (Argentina, Rosario) and María Eugenia (Argentina, Casa del Niño, Adrogué); while among the religious there are Daniel (regional superior), Daví, Wagner and Glecimar (Brazil), Raúl (Paraguay), Mariano, Leandro, Osmar (Argentina). It is our hope that our walking together will bring new light to illuminate the path we want

to follow as a Region.

For this, we meet monthly. We do it through Zoom, since this is the only way during the pandemic. And we spend a whole morning in our meeting. We read and comment on the various documents that the Congregation offers us, plus the minutes of the most recent Regional meetings, in order to absorb through our hearts what our Region is experiencing and discovering. And, above all, based on a searching discernment of our mission, we share our experiences of God, his love and tenderness in our daily lives, and the signs of his presence in our life and mission. We talk and reflect about it. We allow ourselves to be amazed and allow it to illuminate our path. We do it without haste, but with great hope and rejoicing with one another; with the confidence that our good God will open new or renewed paths for us to know and love him more and love him better, and to announce him with true joy and enthusiasm.

Soon we will work together with other teams and we will begin to specify some of the signs that we are discerning little by little, but with great enthusiasm. We do not forget to pray always, for ourselves and for everyone. We put our work in the hands of Mary. She kept everything in her heart and that helped her to be always ready for everything that God wanted, as Saint Michael said. Trusting in her maternal help, I entrust

you to Mary of Betharram. May she always show us her saving 'beautiful branch', Jesus Christ himself. | **Leandro Narduzzo scj in «Betharramitas»**

- On Sunday 25 October the II Regional Meeting of the Betharramite Missionaries was held with the presence of the Regional Superior, Fr. Daniel González scj, two Regional Vicars - Fr. Sergio Gouarnalusse scj (Argentina-Uruguay) and Fr. Paulo César Pinto scj (Brazil) - and representatives (laity, religious, youth and adults) of 16 communities of the Vicariates of Argentina-Uruguay, Brazil and Paraguay.

The purpose was to share the Missionary October, with the theme "Here I am, send me!".

During this meeting, we listened to the missionary testimony of Fr. Tobia Sosio SCJ (General Councillor for the Missions), from which we draw inspiration about availability that

teaches us, as Betharramites, to say "Here I am" and to incarnate it into reality, imitating and following in the footsteps of Jesus and St. Michael Garicoits.

Later, in small groups, we could share some experiences jointly made by lay associates and religious of the different communities. We also talked about how we live day by day the mission, the Here I am and our charism.

Finally, Fr. Daniel SCJ proposed a moment of prayer and introspection as a community.

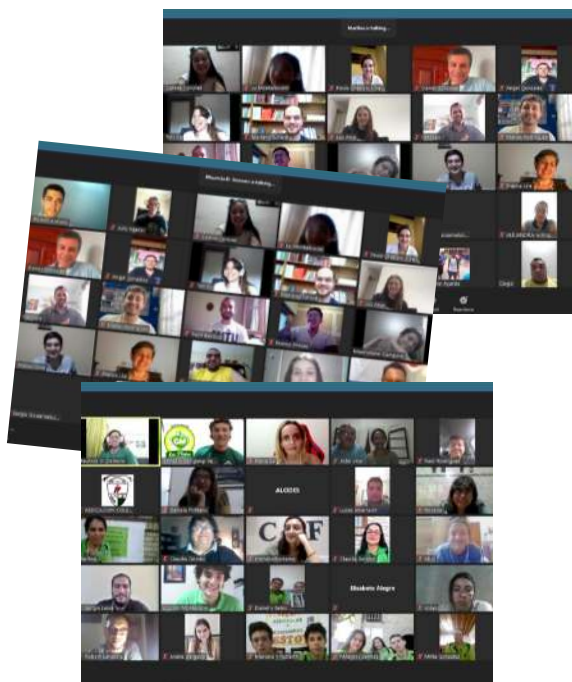
We hope to continue to live these beautiful experiences, feeling all involved in organizing, suggesting or accompanying.



**REGION SAINT MARY OF JESUS  
CRUCIFIED**  
ENGLAND INDIA  
THAILAND

### Thailand

- On 8th October 2020 the vicariate members held their Assembly at Ban Betharram, Chiang Mai. The meeting



began with the Holy Eucharist offered for the departed soul of our dear Fr Pierre Salla scj, one of our missionaries in Thailand who died 4 September 2020. We thanked the Lord for all the blessings our Vicariate received through his life and his work.

Then we evaluated and shared our missionary life in our communities and in the different mission places. We took this opportunity to greet Most Rev Francis Veera Arpondratana, the bishop of Chiang Mai diocese on his feast day.

•\• **Notices from the General Council** •/\•



RL 200 • 217

The ***Council of the Congregation*** is taking place in this month of November in video-conference on the following days: 7 • 9-12 • 18-21 • 23-24 • 28.

***On the agenda:***

- Overview of the life of the regions
- Assessment of the theme of this year.
- Theme of the year 2021: "We go out to share the same joy" (Acts Chap. Gen. 17 - Chap. IV)
- 2021: "Year of Fr Etchecopar".
- The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic in the communities, vicariates, regions.
- The theme of the care for the brother and the creation - Fraternity and social friendship.
- The Vademecum on cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics (www.vatican.va).
- The challenge set by *Fratelli Tutti*: how are we concerned for the next years?
- Today's deterioration of community life.
- Communication in the congregation.
- Economical aspects of the Congregation and of the Regions.
- Personal meeting between the Regional Superiors and the Superior General & Council.

**Agenda :** The Superior General will take part in the ***Assembly of the Union of the Superiors General*** on November 25 to 27th, 2020 (video-conference).



## Father Davide VILLA scj

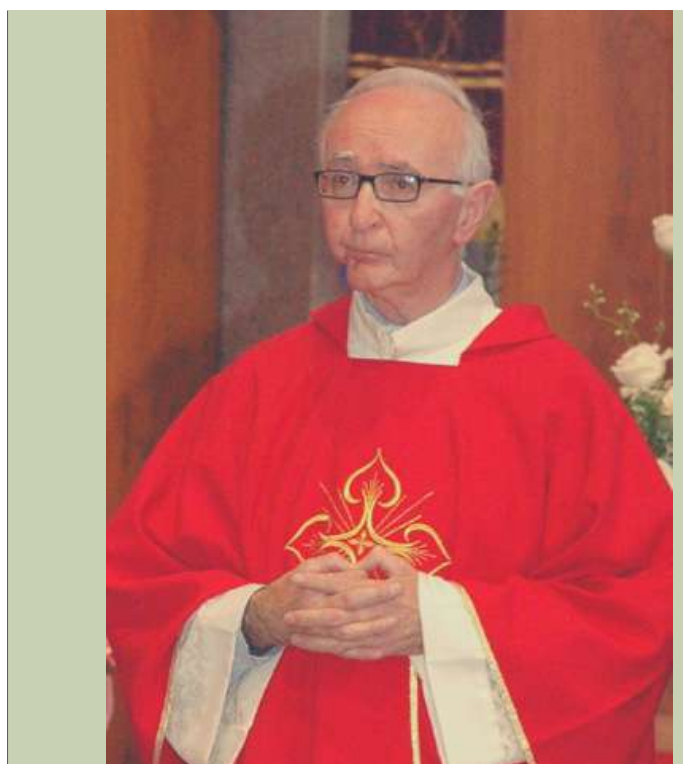
*Cabiate, 7 October 1932 - Erba, 3 November 2020 (Italy)*

In the night of 2nd to 3rd November, Father Davide Villa scj died in the hospital of Erba (Italy, province of Como) where he had been hospitalized a few days before. He was a member of the Albavilla community, and he had just celebrated his 88th birthday.

Fr. Davide was born on October 7th 1932 in Cabiate, a town which he had left when he was young to study, first in the Betharramite school of Colico, then in the Albiate seminary.

After his ordination, celebrated on June 15th 1957 in Milano, Fr. Davide has always been in turn a preacher, in numerous parishes of the Brianza (a region of Lombardy) and around the Lake of Como (giving for a long time a pastoral help to various parishes), and teaching Italian and Latin in the Colico high-school, in the apostolic school of Albavilla and in the high-school of the diocesan seminary of Como. With his naturally distinguished deportment, his classical culture, and his gifts as a lecturer, Father Davide was for years the typical « superior ».

From 1965, he was in charge of the apostolic school of Albavilla (an experience which perhaps marked his life most) where he accompanied hundreds of seminarists, playing the role of the father who might appear



a little rough and severe, but always precisely with a paternal feeling. He was also appointed several times master of the novices. As a Provincial Superior (from 1977 to 1984), he contributed to make the place of Italy recognized in the Congregation, guiding it in times which were not simple from an ecclesial point of view. His experience as a Vicar in the church of the Sacred Heart of Lissone from 1993 to 2004 was the last important step before he came back to his dear town of Albavilla.

The funeral of Fr. Davide was celebrated on Thursday November 5th in the parish church San Vittore of Albavilla. Now our brother rests in the cemetery of Cabiate. | [www.betharram.it](http://www.betharram.it)



...A touch of humour to evoke health, his own and that of others, which appears in all letters! Should we fear seeing in it a complacent fragility? Far from being an obsession for him, health is the “place” where man responds to his Creator. This is what helped him to orient and fertilise his life: *“As we advance in life or rather in death, we see that everything else [...] matters very little, provided that Jesus and Mary be glorified.”*<sup>2</sup> His vision of life? A dying religious expresses it well: *“Without doubt, the thought of death is not likely to give pleasure, especially when one finds oneself empty-handed, but [...] I tell myself that we will have to die all the same. soon, and that in ten or twenty years I will hardly be more ready than today ... [...] Tell all these dear confreres, Priests and Brothers, that I do not forget them [...] and that I love them all with all my heart. [...] May they continue to pray for me; I will try to suffer better and thus give them back through suffering what they will do for me.”*<sup>3</sup> And the superior exclaimed:

1) Cf. Letter to his sister Julie, 25/12/1886

2) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 1/08/1878

3) From the letter of Fr. Basilide Bourdenne, who was at door's death, to Fr. Etchécopar. The latter quoted precisely

## Father Etchécopar and health

*For once news of his health is only a Postscript...<sup>1</sup>*

*“O precious death! O blessed death! May our death be like this death!”*<sup>4</sup> Here, nothing but super-natural! *“Is not this desire for death one of the most consoling pledges of predestination? ... Yes, provided it joins in a true and sincere humility.”*<sup>5</sup> Our Western consciousness, which has taken death away from life, finds itself wrong-footed. Why would this not be an opportunity to rethink our relationship to death and thus a conversion? Father Etchécopar's social and human context is precarious: an industrial society with its share of social misery; a country left to the vagaries of nature and devastating epidemics. With winters at -11°, Bétharram is a real graveyard; typhus and influenza kill widely (on one occasion causing fifteen deaths among the Daughters of the Cross and 7 or 8 among the students of the College)! *“Poor fragile creatures”*<sup>6</sup> he exclaims!

Of course, he remains especially sensitive to these *“nothings ... which another person would ignore.”*<sup>7</sup> The faith response

*this extract in his circular dated 27 June 1883 in which he announced Fr Bourdenne's death.*

4) Circular letter of June 27, 1883, Bétharram

5) Circular letter of January 16, 1887, Bétharram

6) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18/11/1883

7) Letter to his sister Madeleine, Bétharram, 23 /02/1882



is ALWAYS the same: *“The Lord is visiting us this winter through illness: His will be done!”*<sup>8</sup> and Father Bourdenne, dying, he shares his deep conviction: *“What is this persistent evil? ... Ah I can see it! the Lord who loves you tenderly wants to bring you to the perfect union of his Cross, to detach you from all created things, and to accustom you to throw yourself headlong into the hands of his wisdom, his power and of his love.”*<sup>9</sup> This chalice drunk, the strength will be there to work only for divine glory. Let us not forget that, consumptive, Father Etchecopar will always remain at the mercy of a crisis: *“The ‘Always Forward’ [...] transforms our weaknesses into creative power.”*<sup>10</sup> An event will make it possible to go beyond this limit of his nature and allow to shine in his body what the heart tirelessly seeks: his first visit outside Europe. He had never thought

8) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 18/12/1883: Father Etchecopar tells that in this month of December in Bétharram, more than five religious are bedridden or suffering.

9) Letter to Fr. Basilide Bourdenne, [Winter 1882-1883]

10) Letter to Fr. Augustin Abadie, Bétharram, 8/09/1885

of it. Yet after his successful trip to the Holy Land, crossing the ocean to go to Argentina became obvious. *“I, who could hardly leave my room [...], and not without some apprehension for the health of my puny and delicate carcass, hardly had I taken the road to the Holy Land, than I was transformed.”*<sup>11</sup> His fears have evaporated to give way to momentum in service of his mission.

With the death of the founder’s first companions, his awareness of living together grows stronger, thanks to all those who have chosen the Betharramite religious life. To these words, *“he loved so much the one by whom he was so much loved”*<sup>12</sup> are added some more: *“I don’t know, but this life and this death give my soul a perfume that enchants me...”*<sup>13</sup> Being present with the dying brothers

11) Letter to Sister Euphrasie, Prioress of the Carmel of Bethlehem, Buenos Aires, 16/12/1891

12) Circular letter, 27/06/1883 on the occasion of Father Bourdenne’s death

13) Letter to the Fathers & Brothers of America, Bétharram, 4/09/1882

witnesses to the common ideal of all life: *“His heart overflowed! He did not know how to love without giving himself generously..”*<sup>14</sup> But there again, he always concludes: *“Finally, whether life is long or short, may it be only an act of love towards the One who must be in Heaven the object of eternal love.”*<sup>15</sup> If at a human level we say: *“Our nature has a horror of pain and death”*<sup>16</sup>, the believer answers him: *“Death can do nothing with us! It can separate bodies but not souls!”*<sup>17</sup>

The witness is not just spiritual. The superior is also attentive to the health of the workers for the Lord’s harvest. As for himself: *“It is a pity I have to be so careful now, the result of lack of care in my rash younger days ...”*<sup>18</sup> Our works now depend on ailing sick folk: *“We have so many cripples! How many chests weakened and even a little damaged”*<sup>19</sup>; *“Huge gaps everywhere, lives that wear out and are worn out before their time...”*<sup>20</sup>

The burden is real. Hence the encouragement of the necessary rest and the repeated urging of all to be careful and wise: *“There are conservation laws*



*which cannot be violated with impunity; the author of nature established them... It is up to us to observe them ... To work in his service.”*<sup>21</sup> His gaze never ceases to fix on the mystery: *“(God) spares our weakness and nevertheless allows us through these trivialities to feel that we are nothing and to unite the impotence and weaknesses of our sad nature [to Christ]”*<sup>22</sup>. Only one thing deserves attention, only one horizon to look at: *“The perfect joy of eternal goods. Beati Pauperes Spiritus”* with the same enthusiasm, the same desire for union with the Master of his heart: *“(The Lord) wants to share with us his poverty, his incessant labours. This is the portion of the chalice reserved for his best friends.”*<sup>23</sup> ●●●

14) Circular letter, 27/06/1883

15) Letter to his brother Maxime, Bétharram, 17/03/1873

16) Letter to his brother Maxime, Bétharram, 1/07/1872

17) Letter to his brother Maxime, Saint-Palais, 12/10/1872

18) Father Etchecopar refers here to the fact of not having taken sufficient care of his health when he was young, of having abused his health too much... and paying the price for it now.

19) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4/09/1879

20) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, [without date]

21) Letter to Fr. Jean Bergez, Bétharram, 16/07/1881

22) Letter to his sister Julie, Sister Elisabeth, Daughter of the Charity, Bétharram, 4 /01/1882

23) Letter to Fr. Jean Magendie, Bétharram, 4/09/1883



## **SAINT MICHAEL GARICOITS, FROM HEART TO HEART**

••• *Who does not have a word or an expression or a phrase of Saint Michael Garicoits which often resonates in his heart like background music, like an incessant call to keep trusting in the Lord, like the signature tune of the One who wants to fill us of his presence and his love? •••*

I have been asked to select a quotation from St. Michael Garicoits sayings and to write about the way it inspires me in my religious life. Wow! What a wonderful and a thought provoking idea. My immediate feeling was to go back to that moment in which I felt my first love for St. Michael Garicoits when I joined the family of Betharram. I remember well that I had joined this family without having any knowledge about the family, its spirituality, its charism and the founder himself. It was exactly like being a child born into a family without having any knowledge and slowly coming to know about it. It was (late) Fr. Joseph Mirande SCJ, Bro. Gerard SCJ and lately Fr. Enrico Frigerio SCJ who introduced me to the so called person "Michael Garicoits".

I recall well the year 1999, I was in the novitiate. That year, there was

a General Chapter. The theme of the Chapter was something related to "Mystics of The Incarnation". In my simplicity of heart, I often questioned the meaning of that term, how one could become a mystic of The Incarnation etc. At that time, I had not understood. The only answer that I have saved in my memory was this: "God became a man by saying 'Here I am, I have come to do your will' so that man could become God-like to all especially by carrying out everything out of simple, sincere, genuine and unconditional love". That is why I am bold to say that "the X-factor" of St. Michael Garicoits which became the



**Fr. Stervin Fernando  
Selvadass SCJ**  
Community of Bangalore

motivating factor of my initial formation was these two sentences :

*“Here I am, I have come to do your will, o my God”* from Founding Text &

*“Give me a heart that truly loves”* (DS § 101)

As a young religious, I always desired that every fibre of my being could live constantly in the joy of the Lord, first within the community and then everywhere. In the light of this sincere, simple and genuine love, I enjoyed my community life with its activities and responsibilities. This particular sentence: *“Here I am, I have come to do your will”* made me profit from the accompaniment and spiritual direction in a very personal way for my personal growth. Thanks to my formators, this sentence in fact guided me to go deeper into my personal offering and consecration. This sentence indeed helped me to properly understand myself and know all that I am both externally and internally. This sentence challenged me to say that I had found God’s passionate love and the preciousness of my call and vocation. This sentence inspired me to believe that I am in the family of Betharram not by chance but rather by God’s choice.

I was in a way convinced and confirmed in myself that my formation

must lead me towards personal transformation. Moreover Betharramite formation desires this. This I have discovered when I was acquainting myself with the Rule of Life. *“Love is what leads the man forward: it is the secret spring... if it is not there, you cannot do anything”*. Thus, *“Give me a heart that truly loves”* became a beautiful and important prayer in my consecrated life. This beautiful and meaningful prayer proved to me that all my pain can be bearable; all my suffering can be endurable; all my challenges can be faced.

It is true that I became convinced and confirmed that my formation should lead me towards personal transformation. If that personal transformation were not to take place, then my formation years would be in fact a waste. It was too my strong belief. There were certain moments when I felt that my formation did not take me towards that *“secret spring”*, as St Michael puts it. To make myself clearer to you, I was sad at times to see that Indian formation houses were in a process of being eaten up by certain *“cancers”* like regionalism (State mentality), language issues, caste issues, ethnic issues etc. It was painful to see that trained people treat formees with indifference on the basis of region, language, ethnicity, castes etc. It is also so disappointing to see a complete change (not in the positive sense) when a brother becomes a priest. Will I become

like this too? Why is it so? Don't they have a sense of offering and self consecration ? Why?

Such a WHY echoed very often in my heart and mind. But our good father Garicoits has an answer for everything as he proved himself a good counsellor. I remember a sentence Fr. Michael Garicoits wrote to Jean Espagnol (Letter 196), "*Be patient and leave everything to God, to the superiors and to time. I ask you to do this for your own peace of mind, for your own happiness and for the good of the society and the Church*". What an assurance! What counsel!!

It urged me to go on, always forward as a committed religious especially in the formation of my brothers.

Yes, my life experience in the formation houses along with what I had seen and what I had lived, pushed me to have a passion for the formation of my future brothers. I firmly believe that our formation must bring about a transformation and at the same time it must be directed towards making people not only mystics but also prophets. That is to say that we need to train our youngsters as mystics as well as prophets. This is the challenge that the present world sets before us: to train them to have God-experience (Mysticism) and at the same time to speak the truth, to stand up for justice and to do everything out of love rather than out of any other motive (Prophetism).

The Congregation asked me to go to a slum in Bangalore to work

among the poor and abandoned, animated by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes, to go to an Education mission situated among the people of North-East of India (Meghalaya), to have mission experience in Bidar, and to have mission experience in International communities like UK and France-Spain and now in the formation house.

All this was successfully achieved only because inspiration was received through these words of our good father.

After having served as Assistant Novice Master, and Scholastic Master, completed mission experience in international communities and now working as Novice Master, God reminds me through these words that I am only a servant not the Master; I am only the steward not the owner. I am called to be accountable in my work and noble in my task. Yes, God is the owner and the Holy Spirit is the Agent of this noble task. I am merely an instrument who is called to carry out His plans, visions and missions. I do my best and success depends on Him. May this "*Here I am, I have come to do your will*" continue to renew our daily personal consecration and offering. May we be pushed by His Love in our daily commitment to His people. ●●●



***The Feast of All Saints*** is a reminder that it is here, right where we are, living with this brother, with this husband or that wife, next to these neighbours or alongside those colleagues at work, that we are called to grow and develop our vocation of sainthood which, like a burgeoning seed, is sown in our hearts.

*Who are these people whom we commemorate on All Saints Day?*

*It is people who although their names are not written in history, although there is no date in the calendar dedicated to them, although there are no statues or paintings depicting them in our churches, they live their lives in such a way that one cannot help but cry out “these people are saints”!*

*They are like a breath of fresh air in the midst of pollution.  
They are like a shaft of sunlight after days of threatening clouds.  
They are like a flash of joy and hope in the midst of sad news.  
The more numerous they are, the better we feel.*

*How beautiful such people are! How good it is if we too try to be as beautiful as them.  
Let us try to be saints, in our ministry, at work, at home in the family,  
in the community, in every place we find ourselves.*

*Let us pray to the saints, let us imitate them,  
saintliness and sainthood are within the reach of every one of us.*

*Let us walk the path of saintliness and we will be truly happy.*

**| Fr. Carlino Sosio scj**



**Societas S<sup>mi</sup> Cordis Jesu**  
**BETHARRAM**

**Generalate House**

via Angelo Brunetti, 27

00186 Rome

Phone +39 06 320 70 96

Fax +39 06 36 00 03 09

Email [scj.generalate@gmail.com](mailto:scj.generalate@gmail.com)

[www.betharram.net](http://www.betharram.net)