

## September 14 | Feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross



This morning

I went to Igon, and we meditated on these words:

'The mother of Jesus was standing at the foot of the cross. Such a mother... the mother of such a Son...

Standing there not discouraged, on the contrary, courageous, obedient, happy to

be there at the foot of the cross upon which her Son is most cruelly nailed. There, though it is daytime, in reality it is the darkness of night. There amidst the rabble, she is there. So resigned... so good even to the tormentors of her Son.

We can never tire of contemplating this admirable Mother of God... of all women. Externally, what modesty, what sweetness, what calm. But within, no doubt what tremendous suffering! But no bitterness, no complaint, murmur or indignation of any kind, regardless of her feelings. Always sweet, always full of charity, and resigned to the Will of God, content with His will, although it was so bitter for her.

*(Saint Michael Garicoïts, DS § 125)*



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

### Generalate House

via Angelo Brunetti, 27  
00186 Rome  
Phone +39 06 320 70 96  
Email scj.generalate@gmail.com  
[www.betharram.net](http://www.betharram.net)

# NEF

# Betharram

Nr. 173

NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE - 119<sup>TH</sup> YEAR, 11<sup>TH</sup> series - 14 September 2021

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### A word from the superior general

Women of yesterday and today who share the joy of the Gospel

*Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus (Jn 11: 5)*

Dear Betharramites,

Every time I have to restart ordinary tasks (as happens now in September) I recall automatically the figure of my mother. And always I have significant positive memories. Without a doubt it is through her that I have learned many things, such as how to overcome difficulties or start new phases. I learned how to look beyond myself and present circumstances, and trust in the Lord. I thank God for what she meant in my life and for so many other women who helped me to mature and relate better to everyone.

I am sure that each of us could find other similar examples. In fact women were very much present in the early Christian communities (and continue to be so today) and have given great witness, so that they are like a living memory of the

gospel of Jesus. In these times of synodality, of "brotherhood and sisterhood", this recognition comes to resonate with more force. It is well deserved, even if a little late ... With Pope Francis, we are witnessing a progressive participation of women in the highest levels of the Church.

They are the lifeblood of many of our communities. They are a clear majority in consecrated life, pastoral life, catechesis, etc. They are usually the first to go to meet the poor in the peripheries, the sick in hospitals, the abandoned at all levels of existence. Their compassion, their sensitivity, make them privileged agents of the tenderness of a God who is humble. They – just as they did with Jesus – support us with their material resources; They enrich the community with their qualities, they offer their particular gaze and their feminine perspective in the face of pastoral challenges.... in family, educational, parochial problems, etc. They continue to be with Mary today, at the foot of the cross of so many 'Christs' afflicted by the global health crisis.

They tend to have the 'knowledge of the heart' that many times we lack, to detect some potential dangers, possible irregularities, 'oddities and inconsistencies' in our community life. A Jesuit friend once told me: 'seminary cooks do not usually fail when they predict: 'This boy has a vocation...', '... he is good ..., but it seems to me that if he continues

like this ... he will not persevere...'''. Thus, almost without noticing it, they often help us to discern the gaps that are evident in the area of initial and ongoing formation. Capable in psychology and religious life, they collaborate so that we better understand who we are, and who we should be, confronting us with realism.

Accustomed to "walking" through the ways of the Kingdom, they arrive before where Christ is (like the Magdalene) and they become witnesses of the New Life. They do know how to share joy!

But we must also recognize that it is "an art" to know how to be welcoming to women while remaining prudent and respectful towards the brothers of the community to which we belong. Community life demands of us constant learning and a lot of humility in that sense. We are men of clay who can make mistakes, and a lot...

St. Michael has a vast correspondence in which he wisely accompanies female religious. He speaks clearly to the sisters, inviting them to do their best. He encourages them without inhibiting them. He motivates them with good humour and a better mood. He always directs their gaze to their foundation: Jesus Christ. He lets them know that the loving God has chosen and loved them first through Jesus. They are indebted to him

devotion and humility for more than 25 years by Fr Giuseppe in Tuscany, were also represented by a large group.

In the first part of his life as a priest, Fr Beppe (the name his friends and brothers used) had been an enthusiastic teacher who took care of the young people at the Sacred Heart School in Colico (on Lake Como). This humanities teacher, who could have a grumpy manner, was particularly attentive to the pupils who had the most need of support. Everyone could access 'his' meticulously organised library on the condition that they respected the rules and the silence. He was also an activity leader during leisure time and an inflexible referee in football matches. He couldn't wait for Sundays to be able to take off in his little Fiat 500 to the Cosio Valtellino parish where he enjoyed the liturgical celebration amongst the people of God and to appreciate the simple and frank friendship of people like him.

At precisely 50 years old, he sought and took on a radical change of life. Following the steps of a brother and friend, he left Lombardy, his environment and his loved ones with whom he had lived, to answer a 'second calling': to undertake an intense pastoral life at Montemurlo, a densely populated parish in Tuscany. I still have, etched in my mind, the memory of a journey taken with him, in his little car, loaded only with the bare essentials, like those of a pilgrim leaving with some apprehension but with trust in the One who knows and shows the way ... having a brotherly lunch in the motorway restaurant liv-

ened up with shared memories, plans and dreams .... And then a new life not only at Montemurlo but also at Fagnano, a little neighbouring parish, where the mindset of the educator grasped the need of the youth to have a place to meet. Father Giuseppe immediately rolled up his sleeves to create, with a group of volunteers, the 'Campino', a play area that he considered a little masterpiece. As Parish Priest at Bagnolo, he took pains to equip the classrooms for catechism and youth activities.

He wanted to consecrate the last ten years of his life, lived out without particular responsibilities in the Community in Ponte a Elsa, to the service of the Bishop and the diocese, in any place where a need was felt, thus embodying the dream of St Michael who wished for a 'flying camp' of priests serving the Bishops.

Let's keep the memory of him as an enthusiastic teacher to the young, as a good pastor in the service of the Gospel, as a precious and humble co-worker in the service of the Church and of the people who were entrusted to him, as a faithful confessor and as a man of community and fraternal life. We remember him for his warm friendship that he reserved for a good number among us.

...

*Fr. Piero Trameri scj*  
*Regional Vicar*

## Father Carlo Ruti scj *Rome, 4 July 1937 - Genzano di Roma, 17 July 2021 (Italy)*

Of quite another character and calibre, Fr Carlo was accustomed to the liveliness of the youth of the school and of the 'Santa Rosa' parish on the outskirts of Rome. 'Roman by birth' like them, he was frank, almost surly sometimes. He could at the same time show respect towards his superiors and engage in bitter discussions. He was an invaluable guide during Summer youth camps in Orvinio, then a solitary shepherd on the Sabine mountains (a region north of Rome). With his face tanned by the sun and his unmissable black cassock, he devoted himself to the little flocks of the faithful who still lived in the villages scattered on the slopes of that land, who had experienced a phase of depopulation while able to give birth to a modern saint, Saint Agostina Pietrantoni of Pozzaglia, the parish of Father Carlo.

A sort of 'lone wolf' but a sincere religious and a Betharramite 'at heart', Father Carlo lived out the mission as a "missio ad



gentes", from the periphery, with courage, in accordance with a poor and fundamental lifestyle and with serene and total devotion.

Thus Father Franco and Father Carlo met each other again on the way to the Father's house, where they could tell each other about their life experiences and about their pastoral ministries before enjoying together the reward reserved for faithful servants whom He called and who had always simply answered: "Here I Am!"

## Father Giuseppe Franchi scj

*Cislago, 5 March 1945 - Ponte a Elsa, 11 August 2021 (Italy)*

The funeral celebration of Fr. Giuseppe was presided over by the Bishop of San Miniato, Mgr Andrea Migliavacca. The latter was surrounded by around 20 priests from the diocese and by our brothers from the communities in Tuscany as well as the Regional Vicar. The faithful of the parishes of San Miniato Basso, Fognano and Bagnolo, grateful for the pastoral work carried out with



with all their heart.

It is simultaneously a firm and tender relationship, deeply theological, and never self-referential or overwhelming. Therefore it does not occasion abuse of power or conscience and it denotes deep respect. Since he was a child he was developing this attitude.

And we know that it was his mother and his grandmother (and godmother) who contributed to the development of his vocation. "If it hadn't been for my mother, I would surely be a criminal today," Father Garicoïts said years later to his fellow Betharramites during a conference.

Michael had become very loved everywhere, even among very simple people. Highly valued at Anghelú Farm, especially by the

second lady of the house. Along with her, the adolescent Michael was godfather to an abandoned girl.

Later he went on to win the affection of the cook of the Aire seminary and that of the Bishop (she'd been a witch to everyone except him!). He scrubbed the pots for her and she washed & darned his socks in return.

His story continues in Cambo where he learns not only how to be respectful before the old sick parish priest, but also as a young priest, to behave respectfully towards the young women of the community, whom he accompanies on their Christian path, their devotions and their vocation.

In Betharram, he will meet Saint Elizabeth Bichier-Des-Ages, of whom he said: "She is the Good Sister



who has taught me everything.” Witnesses also tell us that: it was two Daughters of the Cross who, in the parlour at Igon, prompted him to make Betharram the place to found a new congregation of missionaries available and self-sacrificing as he dreamed of, since he would be the one to encourage, gather and guide them.

As we can see, this form of fraternity-friendship with women has been for Saint Michael and can be for us Betharramites, a source of joy. It is up to us to reproduce this attitude essentially: chaste, humble and open. Of course, we can be viewed, because of this, as a kind of “oddity” in our times, not only in the Church, but in society too. Why? Because in this world so many people are still often manipulated and degraded.

When the General Chapter met, in San Bernardino 2017, our icon was that of the Meeting of two women: the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth. It is perhaps one of the most feminine pages in the Bible. But this is also the area where the Magnificat, the favourite song of Saint Michael, resounded with all the flavour of the Gospel.

Hopefully, thanks to this constructive relationship with women, in times of synodality, every trace of clericalism, self-referentiality, every power structure, every gesture of discrimination will disappear in us.

I would like that in this year of sharing the same joy, we can once again engender that love for the vocation that we have received, recognizing how much the women of yesterday and today have been present in it.

How much you have loved us, my God, how much you have done and continue to do so that we love you!

- Which women have most influenced your vocation and mission as a Betharramite?

- Do you have a mature, constructive and respectful relationship with them and with your community?

**Fr. Gustavo scj**  
Superior General

## •\• Betharram in heaven •/\•

*The 17th July this year was a sad day for the Vicariate of Italy: two brothers passed away, holding onto each other, towards the Father's house. Fr Franco Cesana SCJ and Fr Carlo Ruti SCJ, three years his junior, got to know each other at the Scolasticate of Albiate where they were prepared for consecrated life and priesthood. Then their paths had separated and each of them had continued to live out the spirituality of St Michael in their own way in their very different communities and environments.*

*And then on the 13th August of this year, the Vicariate of Italy also recognised the entry to the heavenly Betharram of Fr Giuseppe Franchi SCJ*

**Father Franco Cesana scj** Carate Brianza, 3 April 1934 – 17 July 2021 (Italy)

A gentle and docile character, Fr Franco progressed firmly and calmly everywhere that obedience called him. He surrendered himself to the will of God in letting himself be guided by Him with compliance and simplicity. During some long years, he took part in the parish of Lissone before being sent to the hills of Tuscany at Ponte a Elsa, then to the Sanctuary of the Caravina on Lake Lugano as a rector and finally to Albiate, near his home, where he was devoted to the pastoral care of the sick and where, thanks to his good-heartedness, he could be a support for the loved ones of lots of people in difficulty.

In this way, he gave his life, putting himself into the hands of the Lord, of his brothers and superiors with an almost childlike abandon. He lived out his mission making himself close to the most fragile; he brought a good word, a smile, a little gift to everyone; with his easy going character, he visited the sick



in the Carate Hospital, and the guests and personnel of the Zucchi Clinic. He closed his eyes to earthly life in that same clinic, supported by people who knew him well, whom he had visited daily with simplicity and gentleness and by whom he too had ended up being doted on; he was the ‘good Father’ who bestowed the love he had upon everyone: The Word of the Gospel.

**Meeting of the General Council on September 3, 2021. The Superior General, after consulting his Council, decided...**



- to present **Br. Mariano Surace** (Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay, Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar) to the ordination to the diaconate. The celebration will take place on September 26, in the chapel of the Holy Family of Villa Betharram, in Adrogué.
- to grant an **indult of leaving the Congregation to Br. Leonardo Tenorio Reis**, scolaristic of the Vicariate of Brazil (Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar);
- to prolong the **term of Fr. Pietro Felet as Regional Vicar in Holy Land until the General Chapter in 2023.**

#### **On the agenda:**

The Superior General and his Council will be meeting online with the Regional Superiors...:

- . on September 15: meeting with Fr. Jean-Luc Morin, Regional Superior of the Region Saint Michael Garicoits.
- . on September 16: meeting with Fr. Daniel González, Regional Superior of the Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar.
- . on September 17: meeting with Fr. Enrico Frigerio, Regional Superior of the Region Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified.
- . on September 20: Meeting with the three Regionals.

The Superior General will be in the **Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar from October 7 to December 30 in order to make the canonical visitations to the three Vicariates.** The program is still to be detailed according to the conditions dictated by the pandemic. ....

**Angelus, Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**  
Saint Peter's Square, Sunday 15 August 2021

Dear brothers and sisters,  
Buongiorno and happy feast day!

In today's Gospel, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, the Magnificat resounds in the liturgy. This hymn of praise is like a "photograph" of the Mother of God. Mary "rejoices in God because he has looked on the humility of his handmaid" (cf Lk 1:47-48).

Mary's secret is humility. It is her humility that attracted God's gaze to her. The human eye always looks for grandeur and allows itself to be dazzled by what is flashy. Instead, God does not look at the appearance. God looks at the heart (cf 1 Sam 16:7) and is enchanted by humility. Humility of heart enchants God. Today, looking at Mary assumed into heaven, we can say that humility is the way that leads to Heaven. The word "humility" comes from the Latin word humus, which means "earth". It is paradoxical: to arrive on high, into Heaven, what is needed is to stay low, like the earth! Jesus teaches this: "he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14:11). God does not exalt us because of our gifts, because of our wealth or because of our skills, but because of humility. God loves humility. God lifts up those



who humble themselves; he lifts up those who serve. Mary, in fact, attributes no other "title" except servant to herself: she is, "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). She says nothing else about herself, she seeks nothing else for herself.

Today, then, let us ask ourselves, each one of us in our heart: how am I doing with humility? Do I seek to be recognized by others, to affirm myself and to be praised, or do I think rather about serving? Do I know how to listen, like Mary, or do I want only to speak and receive attention? Do I know how to keep silence, like Mary, or am I always chattering? Do I know how to take a step back, defuse quarrels and arguments, or do I always want to stand out? Let us think about these questions: how am I doing with humility?

In her littleness, Mary wins Heaven first. The secret of her success is precisely that she recognizes her lowliness, that she recognizes her need. With God, only those who recognize themselves as nothing can receive the all. Only those who empty themselves can be filled by him. And Mary is the "full of grace" (v. 28) precisely because of her humility. For us too, humility is always the point of departure, the beginning

of our having faith. It is fundamental to be poor in spirit, that is, in need of God. Those who are filled with themselves have no space for God – and we are often full of ourselves – but those who remain humble allow the Lord to accomplish great things (cf v. 49).

The poet Dante calls the Virgin Mary, “*humbler and loftier than any creature*” (Paradise, XXXIII, 2). It is beautiful to think that the humblest and loftiest creature in history, the first to win heaven with her entire being, in soul and body, lived out her life for the most part within the domestic walls, in the ordinary, in humility. The days of the Full of Grace were not all that striking. They followed one another, often exactly the same, in silence: externally, nothing extraordinary. But God’s gaze was always upon her, admiring her humility, her availability, the beauty of her heart never stained by sin.

It is a huge message of hope for each of us, for you whose days are always the same, tiring and often difficult. Mary reminds you today that God calls you too to this glorious destiny. These are not beautiful words: it is the truth. It is not a well-crafted, beautiful ending, a pious illusion or a false consolation. No, it is pure reality, living and true as Our Lady assumed into Heaven. Let us celebrate her today with the love of children, let us celebrate her joyfully but humbly, enlivened by the hope of one day being with her in Heaven!

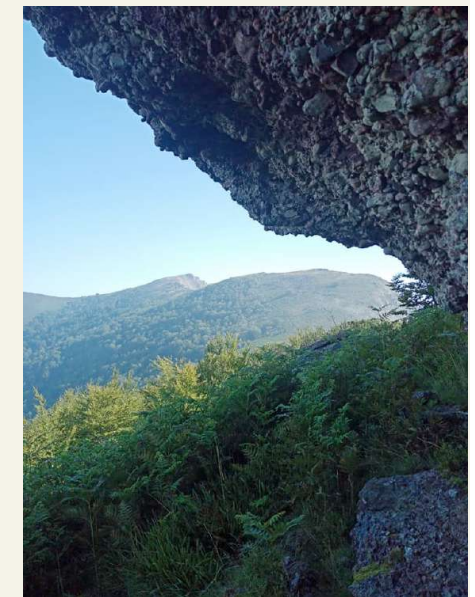
And let us pray to her now that she may accompany us on our journey that leads from Earth to Heaven. May she remind us that the secret to the journey is contained in the word humility. Let us not forget this word, and that lowliness and service are the secrets for obtaining the goal, of reaching heaven. ●●●



the right opportunities and tools to ensure personal development:

1. Encounters for sharing experiences between neighbouring communities, which would encourage and help each religious to query and assess how he is doing and to share with his brothers his feelings on various different aspects of congregational life and on the social and spiritual problems in the area in which he is living.
2. Encounters with experts in the human and psychological sciences, if possible by age band, to help religious cope with the challenges and the gifts present in each period of growth in their lives.
3. Encounters for refreshing our knowledge on topics connected to the life of the Church and society, thereby enabling us to stay “with the times” and to have access to more ways and means of responding appropriately to the challenges posed by evangelisation in today’s world.
4. Annual retreat for religious, namely a period of time to put oneself back into the Lord’s hands.
5. Personal dialogue with the Regional Vicar who, as spiritual animator, can listen not only to matters critical to or even of the life of the vicariate, but also act as a reference to assist each one in his personal discernment.

I think it is important to emphasize that these and all other encounters, just as is any other opportunity for development, can be valid tools of continuing formation only if they are timetabled in and offered at appropriate times such as, for example, the start of each pastoral year; and only if each religious assumes the responsibilities he has in his own life, with genuine deep commitment. That means that everyone must take the commitment made to place his daily life into the hands of God seriously, and allow dialogue with Him to bring the answer to the question: “*Good Master what must I do to inherit life eternal?*” (Mk 10: 17). ●●●





call does not come from within ourselves but from a greater love which called us to follow Him and to serve Him. And thus we are not masters of our own lives, neither of our vocation nor of our mission. Without which we would have interpreted our call merely as a "job" to be done, which legitimises our role but which does not mould or cause our hearts to grow, or progress our life in the steps of the Lord Jesus. What can we do?

- At a personal level, we can allow ourselves to be guided by the spiritual direction or counsel of a brother or a superior, so as to maintain an attitude of acceptance when faced with what the Lord is asking of us each day and so as not to remain stuck in a role which in the end will turn us to fossils.

- To place our life into God's hands, each day, through prayer and discernment.

- To entrust our mission to God by asking ourselves how can we grow to better live the life of service en-

trusted to us, in the Church and with regard to its people.

- To entrust our frailties and weaknesses to God in the sacrament of Confession and in the course of ongoing formation and human growth.

- To deliver ourselves up to God, by cultivating the sentiment of being called to follow and not be masters of our life: don't stand out from the crowd, but follow!

- In sum, avoid all these forms of "homegrown spirituality" which induce us to manage our spiritual life, our daily renewal and discernment on how we follow (or not) the way of God, by ourselves. We are not alone in this course of continuing formation, but live within a community of brothers. How can each of us, in our Vicariates and Regions, be helped along our path to personal growth?

- First, through personal dialogue with our superiors and the dynamics of brotherly dialogue, the "narratio fidei" which, although difficult, helps us to open up and reveal ourselves to one another. How often does a meeting of the community become merely a place for exchanging information and content rather than a space for discussing our life experiences!

- Second, it would be good to introduce the notion at vicariate level of a continuing formation which takes account of the various different dimensions and aspects to be considered for the religious life which give

## •\• Year of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar •/\•

### A competition, till 19 September 2021

Extract from the Facebook page: "Betharram Región RP Etchecopar scj Vicariato Argentina-Uruguay Betharram"

*Inspired by the great work accomplished by Venerable Fr. Auguste Etchecopar who was a close confidant of our Founder Saint Michael, and to celebrate the Year of Etchecopar, we, the SCJ Region Fr Auguste Etchecopar, decided to launch this project of contest with the aim of spreading the betharramite charism and the identity, by enriching the catalogue of images linked to the Congregation. | UNTIL SEPTEMBER 19, 2021*



*You are invited to send an image (digital drawing, print, cartoons, portrait, digital animation, logo, isotype, pictogram) of your invention, based on a Betharramite theme (logos, patterns, devotions, leaders, works, slogans, phrases, prayers, places, etc.). All that comes to your mind is welcome! We only suggest that you present your work in digital format, though it is not an exclusive condition.*

*Fr. Auguste scj himself took charge to consolidate the Congregation and his works from the spiritual and material point of view, and to make known the life and the correspondence of Saint Michael. In its track with all proportions maintained, our modest mission today is to collect all types of visual documentation related to the Congregation.*

**Terms and conditions:** <https://bit.ly/3xP25Uj>

**Formula:** <https://bit.ly/3iepLdW>

For all the information, contact:  
misionerosbetharramitas@gmail.com





## *Father Etchecopar to a lady*

F.V.D.

Betharram, October 24, 1889

*Mademoiselle*

*You ask me to speak to you about holy trust, to protect you from an imminent danger.*

*I am a little indisposed, and the postman will soon be leaving; however since you seem to be rather tossed in a storm, I want to throw you a lifeline at once for you to grasp and which may perhaps help you reach the shore.*

*God gave himself to us, he is ours, he is among us, wherever we are, whoever we are, we can and must say to him: Our Father!*

*He is generous to us with a kind of extravagance.... his mercy and his love. He is always there for us... our crucified love, our comforting eucharist ....of peace and love.*

*And when we have one foot in the abyss, we have the right to always appeal to his justice to his mercy. So placing his holy cross between our misery and his holiness, we can hope against hope for forgiveness, for grace, and glory in the name of Jesus Crucified.*

*There, Mademoiselle, is the sweet and solid truth; this is the path that leads to victory and reward; this is the life which heals us from our mortality, and which makes us happy in holy trust, patient in suffering.*

*May Our Lady bless you! May St Raphaël support you!*

*Your very humble servant.*

*Etchecopar priest*

## What must I do to inherit life eternal?

*One day Jesus met a man on his travels who asked him: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit life eternal?" (Mk 10: 17)*

This Gospel story is very well known and we usually associate it with God's first call: God calls us to follow Him; some respond to this appeal, others don't. But, looking at it more closely, this episode is actually describing passing from one stage to another: this man is already following God's precepts, his lifestyle is one that has consistently complied with the Law, which he has obeyed "since childhood", in every area of his life. This man is already a man of God. However, there is something missing; and it is in this quest for the "something more", which he is lacking, that he asks Jesus: "What should I do now, because my life is already directed towards God?"

Once our initial formation is done, we are like this man; our life has taken a particular direction as we set out on God's path, we chose to follow Him, we became religious, we received the sacrament of the Order, our superiors entrusted us with a mission...

And now, what do we lack? What more should we be doing?

The risk is that we stay where we are. It is so easy to slip into that comfortable habit of doing what we are duty bound to do, thereby allowing



Fr. Simone  
Panzeri scj  
Community of Pistoia

ourselves to be rocked gently in the cradle of the everyday, without actually asking ourselves the question: Should we not be keeping alive the memory of the profound motivations which pushed us into giving ourselves to God, to the Church, to the Congregation, to God's holy people, to the mission...?

We behave as if our life had been given to us on a plate, once and for all. That is why obstacles on our path, the stops along the way, being sent somewhere else, or given new tasks, are destabilising - we cannot comprehend them. Continuing formation arises precisely from not becoming habituated to the everyday, as St Michael would say, which ensures we don't sleepwalk into allowing our identity as a "flying camp" to be forsaken but live with this question continually in mind: "What would you ask of me today God, so I may inherit life eternal?" Become aware that the giving of oneself to another is at the very heart of continuing formation and should be renewed every day. Yes, because this



and guided by the Spirit of the Lord. It is under his motion that I could live in humility and interior state of mind the last step of my vocational path to priesthood. These last times were very dense and rich for me, in every aspect. They are times of grace which go on filling me with an abundant interior joy nothing can take away from me any more. I rejoice to be bathed in this favorable atmosphere granted by the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be blessed !

As a religious deacon, I prepared myself eagerly to the perpetual ministry in religious life, according to our Founder Saint Michaël Garicoïts. The deaconate I carry in my community, in a parish, in a nursing home, in the students' almonry, enable me to get nearer to the Lord's altar, so in deeper communion with his paschal mystery, the source of our sanctification and salute. Prayer – personal and in communi-



Fr. Serge Appaouh scj (left) &  
Fr. Koffi Landry scj (right)

ty – is for me a propitious time which enables me to let me fill with God's Word, to share it better when I preach. It is truly a grace to be an instrument of God, a channel through which he teaches and feeds his people spiritually. So I am happy to carry a mission of our Congregation, especially during my literary studies in university. These are so many experiences which strongly enrich me, on a human level as well as spiritual, communal, pastoral, social and intellectual. Once again, I express all my thankfulness to the Lord for all these marvels in my modest life. Trust-

ing his love, I am going forward to the end with determination. May his Spirit guide me and strengthen my steps. Forward, always!! | **Koffi Djéban Landry scj**

## *Father Etchecopar to Fr. Victor Bourdenne*

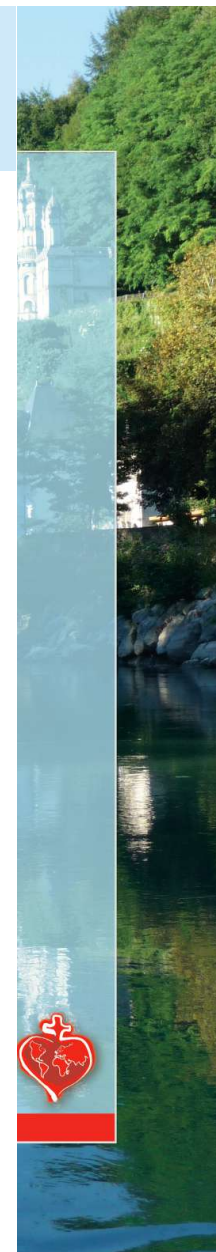
F.V.D.

*April 2 Easter Sunday*

(...)

*“ My God! stoop down to help us understand. Support us until death, quietly, generously, in this struggle, which you have made the condition of life, the only route to the reward and victory which you have always endured, and which you want to suffer still, within the Church, in your mystical body.....on this altar of love, where you are our companion, or even in your sacred tomb, which has nevertheless become the pedestal of your triumph over all your enemies!!! Lord Jesus, my leader and my invincible master!! Here I am! Here we all are! In the footsteps of our founder, to be always humble, always at work, within the limitations of our position, to live and die there, small, submissive, constant, content; this is the pathway that you began and followed; and which, therefore has become our pathway too... We want it, because you wanted it and exactly how you wanted it, written on our hearts: (Legem in medio cordis). We want to fulfill this law of the struggle, like you, with only the weapons of truth and charity, legem in medio cordis; and always for love, rather than for any other motive... according to the motto of Father Garicoïts. And mainly, in view of the reward of your love and the possession of your heart by ours! For you are the God of our heart and your heart is our share in eternity. (Deus cordis mei and pars mea in aeternum). May this be, O infinite Mercy, the great grace of this pilgrimage for me and for all those who are dear to me!”*

*Fr Etchecopar*



## Saint Miriam: a model of faith, humility and generosity

"God is so great, so beautiful, so lovable, but he is not loved; let's love him" says St Miriam of Jesus Crucified. Although she lived just 33 years on this earth, she remains as a model of virtues for all especially to us, the Betharram Fathers and Brothers.

We were privileged to celebrate her feast in our community (SamPhran, Thailand) on 26th August despite the restricted situation caused by the pandemic. It was an apt occasion for us to thank the Lord for sending such a wonderful person to help, guide and strengthen our Congregation.

Fr Joe Mannath, a famous Indian Salesian wrote a book titled *"You Surprised Me"* and it went on to become a best seller; that is to say the author surprised everyone with his beautiful narration on God. Similarly, St Miriam has surprised all of us with her deep faith, perseverance, endurance and generosity. When we go through her biography, we find that her life was full of misery and sufferings. She had to face persecution, humiliation, rejection and the sad reality to live as an orphan until her death. Her strug-



gles began with the loss of her parents when she was just three. From the age of thirteen she had to work as a domestic help; and again, in the young age itself she had to face threat to life when a Muslim boy slit her throat for not converting to Islam. She was

not allowed to enter into novitiate in St Joseph Congregation just because she was too spiritual, which many misunderstood as duplicity. She was accused of a 'possessed person' when she was a Carmelite in India; finally, she had a painful death following a serious fall. *"Always remember to love neighbors. Prefer to be in the company of those who test your patience and virtues; because with them you can always gain merit"* says St Miriam. In all these testing times, she showed remarkable faith and trust in the Lord as she took all these setbacks as opportunities to be humble and to be rooted in faith.

During her stay in France between 1872 to 1875, she mediated in getting our constitution approved by the Holy See. And she didn't stop there, after moving to Holy Land, she wrote

was arduous, and at the same time thrilling and exhilarating.

I confess I have benefited from the experience and disponibility of the Fathers of the Pistoia community. Everytime I solicited them, they answered present. It enabled me to be peaceful and to tie myself down to the tasks entrusted to me as a deacon, either for the parish or the diocese. And I did it with great pleasure and joy. I must also say that the parishioners of San Francesco were very patient with me when I began. And gradually, they could feel that I was more and more fluent in the Italian language and its idiomatic expressions which, indeed, are very tricky.

So my deaconate was joyful and serene because I never stopped benefitting from God's graces, I set myself to "give the same happiness to others" which I received myself without any merit. It is with devotedness, charity in humility, which I tried, as much as I could, to share my joy with all the people I could meet. And let me say it frankly, the faithful christians of Pistoia much returned the joy to me. Now that the time of my ordination to priesthood is approaching, it is with much gratefulness and thankfulness that I would like to say thankyou to all my formators, to those, religious and lay



people which never ceased to accompany me with their prayers, their wise advices, their solicitude. May the Lord give them back everything they did for me in graces and blessings. Forward, always! | **Serge Pacôme Appaouh scj**

**I**t is with a joyful spirit and renewed trust in the Lord that I write to you, to share my testimony of what I lived in my diaconate. In fact, after my ordination to the diaconate, on December 27th 2020, in the Feast of the Holy Family, I went on leaving myself inhabited

## Towards ordination to priesthood (2)

*Ordained priests on 3 July in Yopougon (Ivory Coast), together with Arnaud Kadjo scj and Hippolyte Yomafou scj, Serge Appaouh scj and Landry Koffi scj retraced some time ago their experience as deacons.*

I could not start this article without looking towards the Lord. Yes, I must give thanks to the One without whom nothing is possible. I would not be where I am today without the graces he has never stopped to communicate to me according to my docility. The final profession and afterwards the ordination to the diaconate, for me, made God's call concrete. I confess I have seen a heavy responsibility on my frail shoulders, and at the same time, they were the sign of the love and trust the Lord was placing on me by the mediation of the Church. Henceforth, I was fully a brother in the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, and a deacon serving the Church. I remember as if it were yesterday the day of my ordination which marked two feasts : Saint John the Apostle and the Holy Family, which on that day took precedence. On the very evening of my ordination, my



referent priest of the parish of San Francesco of Pistoia (Italy), Fr. Simone Panzeri, asked me not only to proclaim the Gospel, but to say the homily. I found myself in front of the obedience so dear to our Founder. In spite of my fear and apprehension, since I am not Italian, I put my trust in the Lord and devoted myself to this exercise. It triggered and began a beautiful pastoral experience. Not because everything was so easy and pink, but rather because I had to be very serious and to cling to prayer : I was carrying God to Mankind. I could measure the scope of Christ's warning: if someone wants to walk after me, let him take his cross each day and follow me. Oh yes, the task



*Community of Sampran on August 25th, Feast of Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified*

to the pope Leo XIII, Congregation of Faith, Patriarch of Holy Land requesting to permit Betharram Congregation to have a community next to the Carmelites to become the chaplains of them. So, 'Betharram in Bethlehem' is actualized through the hard work of St Miriam and a pious lay woman Berthe Dartigaux who met the pope Leo XIII as directed by St Miriam. I am sure she continues to intercede for us from heaven.

St Miriam loved God so much and God rewarded her with deep spiritual experiences like Ecstasy, Stigmata and Levitation and her heart was incorrupt even for many years after her death. She remains as an inspiration for us in times of struggles and suffering and she teaches how to be humble and generous. Let me conclude this article with one of her best saying: "it is sweet to hear about Jesus,

*but sweeter to hear him. It is sweet to think about Jesus, but sweeter to possess Him. It is sweet to hear His words, but sweeter to do His will."* Let us thank God for sending St Miriam to this world as a wonderful example of love and humility and seek her intercession for our Congregation, so that we all become authentic disciples of Christ. | **Fr. Rojo Thomas scj, Community of Sampran**



## My “yes” to my vocation in a real incarnate way in Santiago del Estero

I would like to briefly share with you the opportunity that the Congregation gave me during my postulancy to go out and meet people on the margins via the ministry of Paediatrics in Santiago del Estero.<sup>1</sup>

Very aware that Jesus made an option for the marginalized, displaced and forgotten of his time, and wanting to put my talents at his service, I began to serve in different towns and places in the interior of Santiago del Estero, in the departments of Robles and San Martín.

This year the motto proposed to us ‘to go out and share the same joy with others’, that joy that springs from the encounter with an incarnate God who makes the cry of the poor his own. That joy of being able to face so much inequity in access to health and being able to provide human and necessary care to so many children.

The pandemic situation greatly aggravated the difficulty (for the poor) in accessing a basic service like paediatrics. In most cases, people are forced to pay huge sums of money to be able to access a consultation, as well as having to travel long distances to the capital to attend them with the high costs that this entails. And this all happens amongst a popula-



tion who suffer great deprivation and poverty, and who are forced to give money that they do not have. It is also common to hear their stories of having been denigrated and humiliated in medical institutions, which is why a large number of people have abandoned necessary precautions and treatments.

In this context we have discerned as a Betharramite community in Santiago, the need to provide paediatric medical assistance so that “no one is left out.”

At first, I found several bureaucratic obstacles that forced me to give in to the temptation to give up the idea. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, everything moved forward to enable us to serve different communities. We started small, from little simple things, like a scale, a blood pressure monitor and a stethoscope, serving in the chapels or rural halls, until now we have an equipped clinic in the San Isidro Labrador de Forres (St. Isidore the Farmer) Parish. Since then the requests to go and help other towns

have multiplied. There are several people who are surprised and happy at the possibility of being able to access a pediatric consultation after so long. Not only children and adolescents consult, but in the face of so much scarcity, it is also adults who come to listen to recommendations and suggestions. Many of them used to travel from the distant rural areas to mobile clinics, having to queue endlessly from dawn many times but still not getting a consultation.

Faced with this, as Betharramites we felt compelled to go, with enthusiasm, to the margins of society that cry out for the construction of the Kingdom. We are always shown that Jesus healed people’s ailments and diseases. How wonderful to be able to give my ‘yes’ to my vocation from my calling as a paediatrician, in a real incarnate way, putting everything at the service of continuing to build the Kingdom. I am grateful to the Congregation that, following the inspiration

of the Spirit, it allows me to display charity in this field and in this place within my formation process. We are aware that material and spiritual needs are many in these parts, but with the help of God’s grace and by playing our part, we go from the small and the everyday, transforming indifference in going out to share.

The clinic is a privileged place of mission, where existential situations, pains, illnesses, hopes and griefs surface, that we can accompany as religious and doctors. People find our presence very challenging, and the witness of our presence awakens questions. For myself it is greatly satisfying, and I am happy to be able to serve the simple and so often forgotten people during my formation, so that as Saint Paul says “to be able to console those who are in any affliction with the same consolation with which we ourselves we are comforted by God” (2 Cor 1.4). •••



1) Article from the bulletin of the Vicariate of Argentina-Uruguay «Betharramitas» nr. 5, July 2021