

In this issue

A spirituality for a
synodal path p. 1

Selfknowledge p. 5

Overview of the
history of Thailand
p. 7

Challenges and hopes
of synodality p. 10

Missioning with
Fr. Francisco de
Asis scj and the
community of
Sabara p. 13

Meet, listen, discern...
dream? p. 16

Notices from the
General Council
p. 20

† Fr. Dominique
Etchepare scj p. 22

The obituaries
written by Fr.
Etchecopar p. 24

A word from the superior general

A spirituality for a synodal path

*«Did not our hearts burn as he spoke to us on the way
and explained the scriptures to us?» (Luke 24, 32)*

Dear Betharramites,

In this third instalment on *synodality* in our religious family, I would like to briefly address the theme of **a spirituality for synodality**. This time I base myself on an interesting article by Nurya Martínez-Gayol (a Spanish nun, Servant of the Sacred Heart), as well as other charismatic elements that can help us make a reflection.

To begin with, we know that spirituality, by its etymological definition, is a *quality relative to the spirit*, the «condition and nature» of the spiritual.

But we can also speak of spirituality as a *source of life*. A vital breath that surrounds us and makes us exist. The Spirit is

present as the giver of life to any human being and is the basis and mode of relationship of the deepest part of oneself with God.

Spirituality also makes us deeply aware that: «living» is «living together» (social connection), because life is «*communion*». It not only connects us with our «source of life» but also with others. This leads us to take care of relationships at all levels, promoting a full and meaningful life.

Spirituality is not something ethereal, it is above all about “*motivation*”, it has to do with the ideals of the person, with their passion. It permeates the projects and commitments of life. It moves, drives and defines the way of life of each one of us. *It not only inspires and empowers each person but also the entire community.* It represents our way of being and relating to everything around us, including transcendence and history.

This leads us to question ourselves about the «**spiritual life**», since it is a deeply human matter, the condition that sustains the synodal journey. For example, in addition to silence, prayer and contemplation, whoever has a spiritual life will be interested in social and civic life, in socio-political commitment, in making an orderly use of money and time. They will be serious and honest in their own work, and reflect on how they enjoy moments of happiness, and how they deal with pain.

And here we come to a conclusion. It is not possible for us to speak of synodality without cultivating this spirituality of the concrete and the profound at the same time. *With it we face reality and take charge of it and the life of our time, with all its complexity.*

Let us ask ourselves now, just as St. Michael Garicoits did before clothing his founding intuition in the charism of «Here I Am», and allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit:

Which spirit is right and which is not at this time in history?

That is, how can we today “**take charge**” of the situation of our world, and do it in a synodal way, that is, “walking together”.

I propose **five traits of a synodal spirituality** that help us to embrace our vulnerability (theme of the month of September) and to «take

charge of reality».

1. A spirituality of humble listening. For a long time our Church has tried to “see” and now we are about “hearing”. He who sees pretends to possess the world, will dominate it. On the hand the one who listens to the world, cannot determine and control what he is going to hear. In that sense: *how can we take charge of the world without listening to it, without letting its cries and its needs reach us?* This is why we need *humility*. Without humility there is no listening, without listening there is no synodal path. It is not about listening in any old way: we have to be able to listen *«from below (inclining the ear), from close up (drawing near) and from within (with the heart)»*.

2. A spirituality of dialogue. This is about talking and sharing between pilgrims walking together ...sharing the truth that dwells within. It is accompanied by gestures, looks, tone of voice, born from a «listening» (not out of one’s own vision, prejudice, or strategy). This it happened at Emmaus between the unknown pilgrim and the discouraged disciples. They needed humility to welcome the truth from that uninformed «foreigner»... A humble dialogue born woundedness always repairs the past, because it allows the truth to emerge. It also gives hope for the future, because it creates communion in the present. *«Stay with us, because it is late and the day is over»* (Lk 24.29).

3. A spirituality of discernment. True dialogue calls us to open up to the Spiritthe great Other. The Spirit that, from the first moment Jesus Christ enters the world, guides and encourages him to do the Will of the Father (cf. “Founding Text” Saint Michael Garicoits). This is a spirituality of *communal discernment*, in which we are invited to launch ourselves, into that listening-for-dialogue (encounter) with others and with the Other who dwells within and visits us through the Spirit. It will also be important to open up to dialogue with the world in order to discern together, accepting each other more, incorporating differences, and also embracing the small stories of minorities, of the forgotten, and not just the dominant stories.

4. A spirituality of care: There is a call to care for each other, our relationship with God, our bonds, and care for our common home. Take care of ourselves as we have been cared for by our own family,

but above all by *the tenderness of God*, strengthening the bonds of trust to enter into the synodal proposal that the Church makes for us. We have to take responsibility for what we have not done well and what we have done wrong or omitted. We must learn that caring is also guarding the vulnerable and healing those who have been broken, hurt or forgotten.

5. Spirituality of patient resistance (hypomoné in scripture):

Patient endurance (an expression much used by St. Paul) is a very necessary disposition in this ecclesial moment we are witnessing. This isn't the time to be impatient (anxious) or just resigned (pessimistic). What we need is "that patience in suffering... which gives us hope in Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Thess 1:3). Synodality calls for specialists in patience, capable of staying put, of enduring the dark times and misunderstandings of many, the short steps of others, the lack of light and setbacks...

Together we move towards a full and universal communion (the goal of the process of synodal change), but we will not be able to "take charge of the world" simply with agreements, surveys on what the majority thinks, statistics on the points of agreement... We need a true "synodal spirituality".

- Do we recognize ourselves in some of its features?
- How are we living this ecclesial process and what is the Holy Spirit insinuating to us as a community on the way?

P. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General



General Audience • Catechesis On Discernment (4)

Saint Peter's Square, Wednesday, 5 October 2022

Selfknowledge

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

[...] Last time we considered prayer, understood as familiarity and confidence with God, as an indispensable element of discernment. [...] Today I would like, in an almost complementary way, to emphasize that good discernment also requires self-knowledge. Knowing oneself. And this is not easy. Indeed, discernment involves our human faculties: memory, intellect, will, affections. Often, we do not know how to discern because we do not know ourselves well enough, and so we do not know what we really want. [...]

Underlying spiritual doubts and vocational crises, there is — not infrequently — insufficient dialogue between religious life and our human, cognitive and affective dimension. A writer on spirituality noted how many difficulties on the theme of discernment are indicative of problems of another kind, that should be recognized and explored. This author writes: “I have come to the conviction that the greatest obstacle to true discernment (and to real growth in prayer) is not the intangible

nature of God, but the fact that we do not know ourselves sufficiently, and do not even want to know ourselves as we really are. Almost all of us hide behind a mask, not only in front of others, but also when we look in the mirror” (cf. Thomas H. Green, *Weeds Among the Wheat*, 1984). [...]

Forgetting God's presence in our life goes hand in hand with our ignorance of ourselves [...], ignorance of our personality traits and of our deepest desires.

Knowing oneself is not difficult, but it is laborious: it entails patient soul-searching. It requires the capacity to stop, to “deactivate the autopilot”, to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of the recurrent thoughts that condition us, and often unconsciously. It also requires that we distinguish between emotions and spiritual faculties. “I feel” is not the same as “I am convinced”; “I feel like” is not the same as “I want”. Thus, we come to recognize that the view we have of ourselves and of reality is at times somewhat distorted. To realize this is a grace! Indeed, very often it can happen

that erroneous convictions about reality, based on past experiences, strongly influence us, limiting our freedom to strive for what really matters in our lives.

[...] There are words that touch our heart because they make reference to what we are most sensitive to. The tempter, that is, the devil, knows these key words well, and it is important that we know them too, so as not to find ourselves where we do not want to be. Temptation does not necessarily suggest bad things, but often haphazard things, presented with excessive importance. In this way it hypnotizes us with the attraction that these things stir in us, things that are beautiful but illusory, that cannot deliver what they promise, and therefore leave us in the end with a sense of emptiness and sadness. That sense of emptiness and sadness is a sign that we have embarked on paths that were not right, that disoriented us. They can be, for example, degrees, careers, relationships, all things that are in themselves praiseworthy, but towards which, if we are not free, we risk harbouring unreal expectations, such as confirmation of our worth. For example, when you think of a study you are undertaking, do you think only of promoting yourself, of your own interests, or also to serve the community? There, one can see the intentionality of each one of us. [...]

This is why, dear brothers and sisters, it is important to know ourselves, to know [...] what we are most sensitive to, in order to protect ourselves from those who present themselves with persuasive words to manipulate us, but also to recognize what is truly important for us,

distinguishing it from current fads or flashy, superficial slogans. [...]

An aid in this is an examination of conscience[...]of the day: what happened in my heart during this day? "Lots of things happened...". Which? Why? What traces did they leave in my heart? Carrying out an examination of conscience, that is, the good habit of calmly rereading what happened during our day, learning to note in our evaluations and choices what we give most importance to, what we are looking for and why, and what we eventually find. Above all, learning to recognize what satisfies my heart. What satisfies my heart? For only the Lord can give us confirmation of what we are worth. He tells us this every day from the cross: he died for us, to show us how precious we are in his eyes. There is no obstacle or failure that can prevent his tender embrace. The examination of conscience helps a great deal, because in this way we see that our heart is not a road where everything passes without us knowing about it. No. To see: what passed by today? What happened? What made me react? What made me sad? What made me joyful? What was bad, and did I harm others? It is about seeing the path our feelings took, the attractions in my heart during the day. [...]

Prayer and self-knowledge enable us to grow in freedom. [...] These are basic elements of Christian existence, precious elements for finding one's place in life. Thank you. ■



Overview of the history of Thailand

The next General Chapter will take place in Thailand. It is therefore appropriate at this time to offer you a brief glimpse of the country's history, where to date, six Betharramite communities (twelve residences) have been set up, mostly in the North.

The history of Thailand goes back a very long way. Some 10,000 years ago, the Mekong Valley and the Khorat plateau were population centres

civilised by a highly developed people who were, perhaps, the original source of all the Asiatic ethnicities. The discoveries made at the prehistoric

site of Ban Chiang (north-east) suggest that Thailand was the cradle of bronze age civilisation going back some 5,600 years. Archaeological remains also testify to the cultivation of rice in Thailand as early as 4,000 BC.

The countryside was populated gradually **through successive waves of immigrants** (Mons, Khmers, Thais), from Southern China, slowly occupying the fertile plains. The Khmers came to dominate one part of the territory; and between the 7th and 13th Centuries, the whole region was brought together under **Khmer rule** from Angkor.

At the beginning of the 13th Century, the Thais took over power in the North, with the kingdoms of Lanna, Phayao and Sukhothai, meaning *The Dawn of Happiness*. In fact in 1238, it was two Thai chieftains who rose up against their Khmer overlords in this town and founded **the first independent kingdom of Thailand**. The realm of the Khmers

Thailand's coat-of-arms is represented by the Garuda, a mythical figure from Hinduism and Buddhism. The Garuda has the torso of a man, human arms and birds' legs.



Since 1917, the flag of Siam (then Thailand)

*red: the Nation
white: Religion
blue: the Monarchy*

*Traditionally, Thai historians take the foundation of the kingdom of **Sukhothai** as the start of their nation since little is known about previous kingdoms, although research by contemporary historians has shown that Thai history started before that.*

Registered as a World Heritage Site, Sukhothai (photo below) is the first capital of Siam (Thailand), founded in 1238 and ...



... which brought the rule of the Khmers to an end. Located about 450 km to the north of Bangkok, today this vast city lies in ruins.

The majority of the buildings that have been discovered lie enclosed within ramparts reinforced by a moat. But numerous other buildings, scattered in the surrounding rice-fields, are still awaiting to be uncovered.

was pushed back, well inside the borders of what is now Cambodia.

1238 saw the beginning of **a golden age**, during which time the economy grew extensively thanks to the new contacts being made with Portuguese, Dutch, English, Danish and French merchants who started to appear in Siam (as Thailand was then known) at the start of the 1600s.

With **Sukhothai**, we saw the start of Thai expansion into the Chao Phraya river basin, the development of Theravada Buddhism (which became the dominant religion), the creation of the first Thai alphabet and the emergence of a specific Thai artistic style expressing itself in painting, sculpture, architecture and literature.

The decline of Sukhothai in the 14th Century benefitted Ayutthaya, a town located further south, 80 kms away from what is now Bangkok, in the valley of the Chao Phraya, and which became the capital from 1350 to 1767.

Throughout the **417 years reign of the 33 Kings of Ayutthaya**, Thai culture blossomed, forging its own personality, freeing itself from Khmer influence while quite happily rubbing shoulders with Arab, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and European cultures.

In 1767, the Kingdom of Ayutthaya was overpowered by the **Burmese armies**, its capital burnt to the ground and its territory broken up. The destruction of Ayutthaya was a terrible blow for the Thais but a few months later, General Taksin expelled the Burmese and succeeded in reunifying Siam from its new capital Thonburi (now a district in Bangkok) and had himself proclaimed King in 1769. However, King Taksin was pronounced insane, dispossessed of his titles, imprisoned and executed in 1782.

General Chakri succeeded him **in 1782, the first king of the new Chakri dynasty**. The same year, he

founded a new capital, Bangkok, on the banks of the Chao Phraya, opposite Thonburi.

Thanks to the **foresight of Rama IV** (Rama Mongkut, 1851-1868) and of his son Rama V (Chulalongkorn, 1868-1910), Siam embarked on the path to modernisation. King Rama IV was the first monarch to recognise the need to bring his country into with the Western standards of the time.

The accession to the throne of his son Rama V Chulalongkorn furthered the development of Thailand: slavery was abolished, a new more enlightened code of laws was drawn up, and trading relations with the major Western countries were expanded.

The Thais attribute the fact that Siam is the only South-East Asian country to have escaped colonisation, to the diplomatic qualities of both these monarchs.

In 1932, the monarchy was the subject of a coup d'état which obliged the King to adopt a constitution and a parliament. Thailand became a constitutional monarchy. In 1939, **the name of the country** was officially changed from "Siam" (which means Free Country) to "Thailand" - the Land of the Thais.

Between 1932 and 1958, Thailand experienced seven coups d'état and six different constitutions. These events strengthened the power of the military oligarchs and gave rise to strong internal opposition which finally led to the **Thai student uprising of October 1973**.

The country experienced similar instability (coups d'état and new constitutions) in the 1990s.

In 2016, King Rama IX died and his son Vajiralongkorn (Rama X) succeeded him on the throne. In 2017, he countersigned a new constitution intended to strengthen the powers of the Constitutional Court and of the military junta.

(principal source: <https://www.thailande-online.com>)



Rama I, first sovereign of the Chakri dynasty (currently reigning).

Since 1932, Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy. Like his predecessors, the King exercises legislative power under the control of the National Assembly, executive power under the control of a Government headed by the Prime Minister, and his judicial power under the control of the Nation's legal system.

In 2000 and 2010, a movement known as the "Yellow Shirts" (yellow being the colour of the King's birthday - a Monday) arose in opposition to the "Red Shirts". The former brought together essentially an urban elite, conservative, hostile to "western-style" democracy and fervent partisans of the monarchy. They supported the People's Alliance for Democracy party and the Army. The second "camp" basically represented the less well-off classes, who had been won over by anti-poverty measures, were in favour of upholding democracy but increasingly less in favour of the monarchy.



“From the Heart of Jesus to the heart of our people”

Challenges & hopes of synodality

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Fr. Paulo Cesar Pinto scj

Fr. Paulo Cesar Pinto scj, Regional Vicar in Brazil, proposes here a reflection on the journey of synodality undertaken, in particular during the Vicariate Assembly held on 5 and 6 July 2022, in view of the Regional Chapter of the Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar, which has just concluded on November 9.

The synodal pathway proposed for the Church by Pope Francis was embraced by the Congregation in a gesture of communion and witness of unity and centred on the themes of Encounter, Listening and Discernment. This is an opportunity for each one of us to open up our hearts and to touch the precious treasure that ‘we carry in clay pots’ (2 Cor 4.7).

The Encounter implies a two-way street: a willingness to go out of oneself, but also a receptivity towards those who come our way.

It is necessary for all of us to be creative and face new situations and challenges needing responses that require from us a new level of human and spiritual integration as consecrated persons, so our responses can be meaningful. As religious we are not alone: we have our community and our confreres. Therefore, the internal encounter takes place between brothers with a lot of history and experiences in common. In the case of Bétharram, we share the same spirituality, the Mysticism of the Incarnation, the profound encounter between the human and the divine where two become one. As theologian Leonardo Boff puts it “*Human like Jesus, who is God himself*”. The Encounter among ourselves leads us to the External Encounter, leading us to make our people a sacramental presence, a presence that is fearless, disinterested, generous and full of gentleness. But implying also a deep



respect for the presence and mystery of the other.

The theme of the Encounter is very conducive to the recovery of utopia, a way of dreaming, and dreaming together, in an age deeply marked by disenchantment with politics. This disenchantment affects the church and even has an effect in the family of Betharram, loosening bonds between brothers and generating crises in the sense of belonging. We have to recognize the anthropological need for structures, but whether we are evangelized or evangelizing, we must also take into account our own humanity as consecrated persons who have names, feelings, flesh and blood. Consecrated people are real human beings!

The most challenging thing about Encounter is the fact that there is a need for Listening. And listening is

deeper than simply hearing. Hearing takes in everything that comes, and amplifies or confuses what is indistinct. But listening, on the other hand, implies being touched by what comes to us through hearing, and not only through hearing, but also through the other senses that affect and give meaning to life itself. It is so powerful and transformative that when a brother perceives himself heard, the chances of deeper understanding and deeper knowledge of himself opens up, enabling him to flourish more fully for life and mission.

There is a hidden pitfall around Listening these days, which is about the excess of the stimuli of the senses. We are bombarded with sounds and images these days, which can beget an attitude of indifference, which has a numbing effect, an obstacle if we are trying to communicate either the hard reality of the cross, or the gift

of the present moment (Kairós). The quality of the Encounter is directly linked to the quality of listening.

That said, it is urgent that we learn to listen. Listening is a delicate skill that can be used in all situations, but is never the same in all situations or with all people. There is no fixed model. Each Encounter is different from the other and, therefore, requires a different creative form of listening. We human beings are a good example of divine creativity in our likeness and diversity. In order to make the Encounter truly human, the mysticism of Listening must be developed.

Listening is to be done with honesty founded on goodness. It is demanding and needs love. What you hear must be allowed, to be soaked with tenderness, like a sponge in water, with gentleness and respect for what you hear. Listening allows the pain of the other to show itself and allows the listener to show empathy. A Listener does not fear to be sullied by the mud of the other, and so both become transfigured.

In the situations where the Encounter and Listening take place, the possibility for Discerning opens up. Mine gives way to ours. And this requires growth and maturity that lead the listeners to "*reach the stature of Christ*" (cf. Eph 4:13). These situations are the places where rigidity,

legalism and top-down uniformity give way to communion and unity-in-diversity with a horizontal and all-around vision. Opacity gives way to transparency. False security vanishes in the face of the adventure of personal and community pilgrimage. The deep reality of being both a Holy and a Sinful People on a pilgrimage (cf. Eucharistic Prayer V) united in communion and commissioned to play our part in building God's kingdom, is liberating. This generous gift of love, of the one who first loved us, sets us free from the limitations of our own culture. We are invited to begin the adventure of letting ourselves be enveloped by the tenderness of "God melted with love for us". Those who know they are loved respond with love and come to an understanding of the people and realities before them more quickly. They become mystics of Encounter, Listening and Discernment. Their presence is the sacrament of the Incarnation and of Hope... ■



*Fr. Francisco de Asis
Dos Santos scj*

and the Community of Sabara • Brazil

The mission of our Betharramite community in the Sao Sebastiao parish in Sabara, a town situated in the suburbs of Belo Horizonte (in the Minas Gerais State), started in 2012 with the presence of the Fathers Marcelo Rodrigues scj, Sebastiao do Nascimento scj and Davi Lara scj. Since then, our activity has been consolidated according to the request and wishes of the archdiocese and the parish itself.

Along these ten years, our mission has known several developments. First, it consisted in bringing some help to the People of God for celebrating the sacraments and for pastoral needs. Until then, the parish had no priest, this is why this beautiful mission had been proposed to us. In that sense, the request coincided with our Betharramite charism which is « to serve where we are asked and in the position which appears necessary ».

The essence of our Betharramite charism was able to express itself

through the simplicity, humility and devotedness of our Fathers and Brothers who worked in this parish for two years. It showed itself very naturally along the talks, accompaniment, confessions, dialogues and visits to the families. A small group of parishioners started to get interested in our life style and our ways, then wished to really deepen our charism, our spirituality and mission.

It is a group of young people, animated till then by Fr. Luiz Henrique Ribeiro scj, which was first formed.





Wishing to organize multiple meetings, afterwards it collaborated to create events, pastoral activities and visits to the families of our parish. These activities awakened in them curiosity, then the desire to know our charism better and initiate a course of vocational discernment among our Betharramite religious family.

In a second phase, also following the work realized by these young people, their families and other parishioners have been more and more attracted by our spirituality and charism, because of our simple way of living and acting. So a small group of lay Betharramites was born. Afterwards, these lay people have wished to live monthly meetings to share the life, God's Word, and the history of our Congregation, the charism of our Founder Saint Michael Garicoïts, and then our mission in Brazil and in the world.

Their enthusiasm grew to the point of wanting to take part also in a mission, first amidst the parish. Then, initiated by the lay people themselves, with the help of Fr. Eudes Fernandez scj and Jeferson Gonzaga scj (a member of the community at that time), then of Fr. Gilberto Ortellado scj, a community called Our Lady of the Beautiful Branch was constituted. The group then engaged itself beyond the parish, by taking part in meetings and missions with the Fathers, Brothers, and lay Betharramites in other parishes and Betharramite communities in Brazil, as far as the regional level.

A third phase of our mission in Sabara is when Fr. Eudes Fernandes scj and myself have worked in helping the poor and most vulnerable who are numerous in this San Sebastiao parish situated in a peripheric zone between Sabara and Belo Horizonte.

Thanks to the work accomplished along those years, the meaning and strength of the Betharramite charism can be perceived today in the help given to families, in collaboration with the archdiocese and in communion with the Sisters of the Congregation of the Disciples of Jesus Eucharist, who before the arrival of the Betharramites in Sabara, already had such activities as distributing food baskets to the distressed families of the parish. So, through the listening work of the Fathers and Brothers, and through the visits to the families, we have perceived the need to install in the parish the



NAASP (Center of Welcome and Solidary Parish Net), a social project promoted by the archdiocese. This Center was officially inaugurated by the Metropolitan Archbishop, His Exc. Walmor Azevedo de Oliveira, during a beautiful celebration, on October 26th 2021, where our Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agin scj., then in a canonical visit, was present.

Up to now, from 100 to 200 families have benefitted from this social project which includes not only the distribution of food baskets, but also assistance in several fields : spiritual, psychological, medical accompaniment, juridic counsel in matters of protection and orientation about the citizens' rights, with the help of benevolent lay professionals and parishioners.

In spite of our difficult times, specially in this post-pandemic phase, our mission goes on being fecund and bearing good fruits, especially in the field of human promotion and life care.

At last, our presence and Betharramite mission in Sabara during these ten years have also been favourable, because they have helped us to live our Betharramite vocation in an incarnate way, to answer the calls of the Heart of Jesus poor, humble and obeying God's will, always compassionate for the poorest. It is what had moved St. Michael's heart and had urged him to reproduce and show the same generous impetus of the Heart of Jesus in his mission in the world. ■



Regional Chapter of the Region
Saint Michael Garicoits

Meet, listen, discern ...
dream?...

|
Fr. Jean-Luc Morin scj
Regional Superior

The Region of Saint Michael Garicoits has just experienced its third Chapter in the shade of the Shrine of Our Lady - in the shade is just the right word in this Bearnais autumn with its summer feel. I'll start by giving you an overview, paraphrasing the secretary's summary. Then I will share my impressions, in all simplicity.

1. The process

From Wednesday 19 to Sunday 23 October 2022, 24 Bétharramites¹ representing five vicariates in seven countries (Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, France, Spain, Italy, Israel, Palestine) were gathered together in our place of origin. The community's welcome made everyone feel at

1) 24 capitulants, including two guests: Fr. Fulgence N'Guetta, representative of the scholastics and Fr. Firmin Bourguinat, Dean of Session.

Two Fathers were unable to come in person: Fr. Pietro Felet, regional vicar in the Holy Land, who remained alone in Bethlehem, and Fr. Marie-Paulin Yarkaï, Deputy of the Central African Republic, who didn't get his visa.

home. The meals taken at the retreat house nourished our conviviality, which was enriched, on Saturday evening, by the common prayer with the elderly religious. At the end of vespers, Fr. Pierre Grech expressed his thanksgiving for Bétharram: it sounded like a call to unity and hope.

The tone had been set from the very first day by Fr. Daniel Regent, a Jesuit who was in charge of the Apostolate of Prayer. Starting from the Sacred Heart, his teaching has enlightened us on the sym-bole²

2) The primary meaning of the word symbol in the Christian context is "a form that contains the principal articles of faith."

'In the beginning, the Greek "symbol" (sym-ballein, put together, bring together) in fact meant an object (such as pottery, a ring or shelf) composed of two adaptable parts and used as a sign of recognition. Every man holds faith only as a "symbol", as an incomplete and broken piece, which can find its unity and completeness only by uniting with others, as theologian and future pope Joseph Ratzinger explained in 1969. To achieve the "symballein", union with God, one must necessarily go through the "symballein" union with other men. Faith requires unity, it calls brothers and sisters in faith, it is essentially oriented towards the Church.' (Nicolas Senèze in "La Croix", 13 February 2013)

dimension of our vocation, uniting, as in Jesus, humanity and divinity. The opening Mass at the oratory gave rise to a narratio, where everyone shared what he had received. The following day, the celebration in the Chapel of Saint Michael gave us to experience, "how good it is for brothers to live together and to be united." On Sunday 23 October our most recently ordained priest, Fr. Christian Yao, presided over the final Eucharist at the old shrine, in the presence of many friends of the congregation invited for the occasion: a beautiful communion of religious and lay people, extended by a reception and festive lunch at the college.

In the Chapter room, the first two days were devoted to reports: the regional councillors presented the highs and lows of their respective vicariates. Taking a cross section view, the regional superior invited us to make an assessment of the Body

we form, and the next day, it was the turn of the regional bursar to take stock of the situation.

The time for listening was then extended to other speakers. On Wednesday afternoon, the exchange with the Bishop of Bayonne helped us to reconsider our service to the local Church. The evening was dedicated to an overview of the pastoral care of young people, presenting the testimonies of those most involved: young people in contact with us. It was the same synodal approach, on Saturday afternoon, with a speech from the French laity of the Me Voici Fraternity, followed by audio or written contributions from their counterparts from the Ivory Coast and Italy. With them we felt the importance of drawing from the same spirituality, and of collaborating more in apostolic work. Finally, Brother Fulgence N'Guetta conveyed the expectations and the passionate





involvement of all in the services. The sharing was intense, the confrontation sometimes vigorous – conveying the truth in charity is a whole art that takes time, but is something we

pleas of the brothers in formation to the members of the Chapter.

After the gathering and listening, came the time of discernment. The working groups were held on Thursdays and Fridays. They revealed the solidarity between the north and south of the region, the diversity of our missions, but also our personal and community weaknesses. In addition to the various votes to elect representatives to the general chapter, the last two days were well occupied by reflection, discussion and voting of the resolutions. All in all, this “return to the beginning” has demonstrated the value of brotherhood, the desire for faithfulness and the need for renewal to invent the Bétharram of the next six years.

2. My impressions

The above reflects the climate of the Chapter, marked by the simplicity of relations, the contagious joy of the African delegates, and the

have missed.

The roadmap had been posted from the start: “meet, listen, discern... dream?” Over five full days of Chapter, a time of encounter par excellence, half was devoted to listening and the other half to discernment. It was too short to harvest the fruits of preparatory meetings in vicariates, rework them in small groups in light of the reports, and re-elaborate them in plenary sessions. This tight programme has left little room, if not for dreams, at least for prophetic options.

From the outset the guidelines may appear to fall short of the inquiries received, the challenges identified and the fraternity lived. Certainly, good things have emerged, around attention to people, ongoing formation, economic autonomy and responsibility, not to mention declarations of intent for the Holy Land and the scholasticate of Abidjan. On the other hand, in terms of the choices to be made and the new boundaries of the mission, we

could have expected more audacity on the part of a rejuvenated group.

Could such an impression be due to fatigue, after intense meetings and eleven years of regional work? Could the pragmatism of the resolutions reflect the concern not to pre-empt the General Chapter? Would we question the wisdom of betting on the dynamic of the congregation, rather than limiting ourselves to the vision of a region? In any case, if I have any advice for the 4th Chapter, it would be to give myself at least six days every six years to analyze the reality, and to project ourselves towards the future.

I will end where the chapter began, with the recollection of Fr. Regent who inspired his listeners and continues to dwell in me. The first excerpt: *"Joy, at the heart of difficulties, is the central witness borne by Christian life: it is the characteristic of Easter joy."* The second, *"The broken Heart of Christ comes to embrace our*

hardheartedness. It gives strength, vitality, healing of wounds and forgiveness of sins. The two pieces fit perfectly... This new heart gives me a new life in Christ. It also makes me participate in the heart of the Church." And finally, *"we live in a time of humiliation. This humiliation is necessary to return to humility. The Church had become accustomed to a dominant position. In this perspective of humility, poverty is an opportunity. We carry a treasure in clay vessels."*

In the perspective of Chiang Mai 2023, the invitation is extended to all the "faint-hearted"³ that we are: becoming more and more the «apostles» that Saint Michel Garicoïts dreamed of. In other words, religious with a Sacred Heart, devoted and obedient servants, brothers on the move. ■

3) *"Let us make no mistake: even if we were apostles, we are just faint-hearted... Let us present ourselves to God as wretches; he will exalt our humility and, with weak but docile faithfulness to his grace will do great things". (DS§176)*

Delegates of the Region to the General Chapter 2023

Central Africa

Fr. Tiziano Pozzi

Ivory Coast

Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi

Fr. Vincent Worou

France-Spain

Fr. Laurent Bacho

Br. Emile Garat

Fr. Sylvain Hounkpatin

Italy

Fr. Ercole Ceriani

Fr. Mario Longoni

Fr. Simone Panzeri

Fr. Piero Trameri

Holy Land

Fr. Pietro Felet

In the meeting of the General Council on November 1st and 2nd, 2022,



■ the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, ***admitted to final profession:***

Br. Stephen RAGHU (Vicariate of India, Region SMJC)



Br. John Weerapong YOUHAE (Vicariate of Thailand, Region SMJC)

The celebrations will take place respectively on January 17th & 27, 2023.

■ He decided ***to present to the diaconate Br. Fulgence N’Guetta Oi N’Guetta SCJ*** (Vicariate of Ivory Coast, SMG Region). The celebration is scheduled for January 22, 2023.

■ He approved the appointment of

- ***Fr. Armel Daly Vabié as Superior of the community of Bimbo (Bangui)*** for a ***second term*** from November 1st, 2022 (Region SMG, Vicariate of Central Africa);
- ***Fr. Sylvain Dansou Hounkpatin as Superior of the community of Betharram–Notre-Dame*** for a ***second term*** from January 1st 2023 (Region SMG, Vicariate of France-Spain).

■ ***He granted to Fr. Mauro Henrique Ulrich de Oliveira scj an additional Year of exclaustation*** in the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro.

■ The Superior General, with his Council, expressed a favourable opinion on the ***construction of a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Betharram*** in the new betharramite center for spiritual retreats in Chomthong (SMJC Region, Vicariate of Thailand) on the conditions indicated by the Regional Superior in the presentation of the project.

Reminder (Agenda)

- Dates of the **next meetings** of the General Council and the Council of Congregation/Preparatory Commission of the General Chapter.

General Council: Thursday 1st December 2022

General Council: Thursday 12th January 2023

Council of the Congregation: From February 20 to 25, 2023 (in-person)
during which the **General Council will meet in plenary session**

General Council: Thursday 13th April, 2023
(matters for ordinary administration only)

General Council: Thursday 4th May, 2023
(matters for ordinary administration only)

GENERAL CHAPTER

9

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29

JUNE

2023

In the Peace of the Lord

Italy | On Tuesday, October 25, **Mr. Remigio Trameri**, 88-year-old, brother of Fr. Albino Trameri SCJ, of the St. Michael community of Albavilla, returned to the Father's house. We join Fr Albino and his family in praying for the repose of the soul of their dear one.



Bétharram
dans la maison du Père...



NÉCROLOGE 2022

The obituary updated to 31 October 2022 has been sent via email in pdf to the Regional Superiors and the Regional Vicars for all the communities.

The pdf file can be sent to any religious who requests it to scj.generalate@gmail.com

Father Dominique ETCHEPARE scj

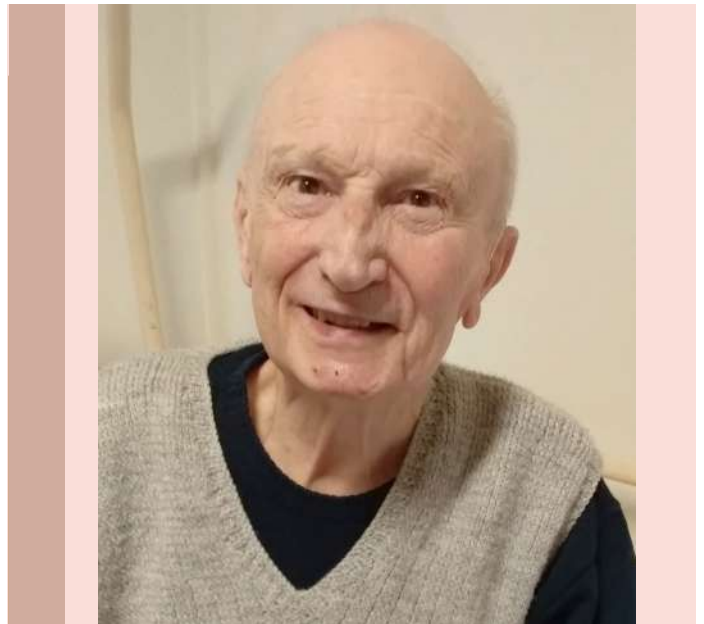
Saint-Palais, 24 June 1927 – Betharram, 16 October 2022 (France)

<i>Homily</i>		<i>Funeral</i>	<i>Mass</i>
<i>Betharram</i>	<i>18th</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>2022</i>
<i>Romans</i>	<i>8:18-23</i>	<i>& John</i>	<i>3:16-17</i>

"God so loved the world that he sent his Son into the world, not to judge the world but so that, through Him, the world might be saved." Our founder was fascinated by this love of God and we know that in his founding text, The Manifesto, he gave us this contemplation of love at a time when so many Christians had experienced the Jansenist movement, like a kind of grief.

Dominique meditated on this love of God for the world and let it saturate him. In his room, there is a picture of his patron saint, St Dominic, with that quality which is mentioned "the sweet mercy". Our brother, without doubt, did not have the preaching talent of his patron saint but he did borrow St Dominic's way of "sweet mercy". I can testify to this, as I met him as the school's discipline prefect more than 55 years ago. We were not afraid of him because he was not brutal but we respected him and loved him because we felt there was kindness in him, even in the punishments imposed.

What's more, we felt respected and supported exactly because of our modest social origins amongst pupils whose parents were wealthy. He practised, I



think, this sensitivity because he knew how to blend modesty with his origins at the Aïcirits Mill (two kilometres from Saint-Palais). He loved, for that matter, coming back to Amikuze (in the Saint-Palais region) at the end of the week, helping out at the region's eucharistic celebrations, thus going back to his roots. Like St Michael, he had this experience: "the more I go back to the modesty of my origins, the happier I become." Modest origins but full of faith in the vicinity of Saint-Palais, influenced by our two founders, Garicoïts and Etchécopar to whom the title of second founder was attributed. Isn't Aïcirits near Oneix, where the founder was a servant for three years as a teenager?

While very young, he responded « Here I Am » by coming to Betharram, then the novitiate in Balarin in the Gers region, before the end of the war. His

first vows in 1945 then philosophy in Bethlehem before being pushed back by the war of 1948 to move into the new formation house in Floirac, a suburb of Bordeaux, where he was ordained priest in 1951, 71 years ago !

Then in office as educator at the school in Betharram – for 40 years ! – where his talents were brought to light. Despite a fragile health, he was very sporty, whether it be on the ‘fronton’¹, on the tennis court or in the pool. He was an educator who would say exactly what was needed, who could reach teenagers and young people in their crisis of faith and in their questioning due to different traditions handed down from their parents. One word that touched hearts, by being a witness of his faith and of his consecrated life. After this demanding office, it was the Refuge chaplaincy (Servants of Mary Community), near the Servants of Mary of Anglet which allowed him to find more peace, having a fragile health. Then, for almost nine years, he was in this New House Community following a serious health problem. He was indeed disabled these last years, unable to keep up with the rhythm of community.

He needed to be surrounded by all the care and remarkable tenderness of the nursing staff of this house. And he passed away so gently to experience that meeting of love with the Lord, this Father full of mercy. He was asked to go through this degrading experience of losing his independence to live out

this submission in his different needs. Scathing experience, after caring for his natural elegance, which the photos remind us of.

Yes, he knew all about the ‘pains of labour’ in his being which worsened, as mentioned in the first reading ; he had to cry out his suffering in the poverty of his relationships lately. He waited for the deliverance of his body before experiencing this luminous face to face meeting with the Lord whom he loved as a religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This faithfulness was possible for him, thanks to the affection of his family, to the caring close circle of the religious community and of other residents, and to the presence of all the staff in this house.

And now that he knows the solace of the love of God, we ask him to carry our concern about vocations. In his room, there is an enlarged photo of Floirac in the years 1948-1950 : fifty scolastics with their remarkable teachers (Brunot, Duvignau, Mirande, Matéo...). A dream that supported his prayer and which may still live in him.

Let’s give thanks to the Lord for our brother, Dominique, who answered the Lord « *Here I Am* », at Aïcirits as in Betharram. Let’s return him to the saving arms of our God, Saviour and Father, full of sweet mercy, he who for the forty most beautiful years of his life lived at the edge of this river where the tenderness of the mother for her son was demonstrated. | **P. Laurent Bacho scj**

1) front barrier in Basque pelota (editor’s note).



“The Obituaries written by Fr. Auguste Etchecopar scj”

Extract from the November supplement by Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj on the obituaries written by Fr. Etchecopar (soon available on www.betharram.net):

In these obituaries, Fr. Etchecopar always transmits to us a very positive spirituality of death. If it is painful because of the loss of a brother, it is also a consolation in witnessing the serenity with which the religious face their death, offering their life to the Lord, in faith and in the hope of the promises of Jesus for those who have been faithful to the demands and duties of their vocation.

Extract from the Circular Letter of March 7, 1894, in which Fr. Auguste Etchecopar announces the death of Brother Pierre Saint-Martin Lamon scj:

Oh! my dear Fathers and Brothers, how helpful devotion is for everything, and what a scent she leaves after her! Oh! how advantageous it is to live humble, generous, and faithful in the Heart of Jesus, under the wings of the divine Mother, to die there a sweet and precious death before God [...] After the burial, a brother reminded me of one of his impressions: “I am edified by observing that since my entry into Betharram the brothers die in peace and even in joy. I heard one of them say to me in his agony: I ask the Lord for his glory, to make our Congregation grow throughout the whole world”.



Societas S^{mi} Cordis Jesu
BETHARRAM

Generalate House

via Angelo Brunetti, 27

00186 Rome - Italy

Phone +39 06 320 70 96

Email scj.generalate@gmail.com

www.betharram.net