

NEF

Betharram

Nr. 193

NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE - 122ND YEAR, 11th series - 14 June 2023

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The XXVIIIth General Chapter 2023 welcomed...



...by the Vicariate of Thailand





Opening of the XXVIII General Chapter

On June 9, the XXVIII General Chapter of the Congregation opened with a solemn Eucharistic celebration presided over by Mgr. Francis Xavier Vira Arpondratana, Bishop of the Diocese of Chang Mai.

The celebration was attended by numerous Betharramite religious from the Vicariate of Thailand and was animated by the scholastics who had come from our formation house in Sampran.

In the afternoon the Chapter Members met in the Chapter hall and, introduced by prayer and the lighting of the candles at the Sacred Heart, the prayer the «Salve Regina» was sung. Fr Gustavo Agín scj (President of the Chapter Assembly), after having verified that

everyone was present, declared the XXVIII General Chapter of the Congregation officially open.

Then continued the election of the scrutineers, of the secretaries and of the Commission of Coordination of the Chapter.

General Chapter of 10 June

On 10 June the Chapter assembly met at 08.30.

The three Regional Superiors presented the life of their respective Regions, taking into account what emerged from the Vicariate Assemblies and the Regional Chapters.

In this way all the members of the Chapter had the opportunity to get to know the life, the challenges and the prospects for the future of each Region more closely.

Report of the Superior General to the Chapter

Subsequently, the Superior General presented the report of the six years of management from 2017 to date.

Father Gustavo highlighted in his report that the General Chapter of 2017 asked the Congregation to *“Go out to meet life”* and since then, the Congregation has set out. *“A lot of joy accompanied the journey along the way, but also a six years full of tests, great surprises and unexpected challenges. However, our hopes for the future remain intact.”*

In the afternoon the Superior General presented his reflections on some fundamental Elements of our consecrated life and some proposals.

With all these presentations, the members of the General Chapter have a clearer picture of the life of the congregation worldwide.

In the last part of the evening, Father Graziano, general secretary-bursar, presented the financial report of the congregation.

With these presentations, the chapters provide an overview of the life of the congregation in the world. ■ www.betharram.net



Open up, rise up, let us walk together! [III]

*“Without the inner Master, nothing can lead us to the best doctor.
The Catholic Church, our superiors, our Rule,
like milestones on major roads, teach us the route.” (SMG)
[DS § 129]*

Dear Betharramites:

As the 2023 General Chapter begins in Chiang Mai, we share with the entire religious and lay family of Betharram this desire **to walk together with the People of God**.

In previous editorials we have talked about “Open up” (April) and “Get up” (May). Now we will dedicate ourselves to “let us walk together”.

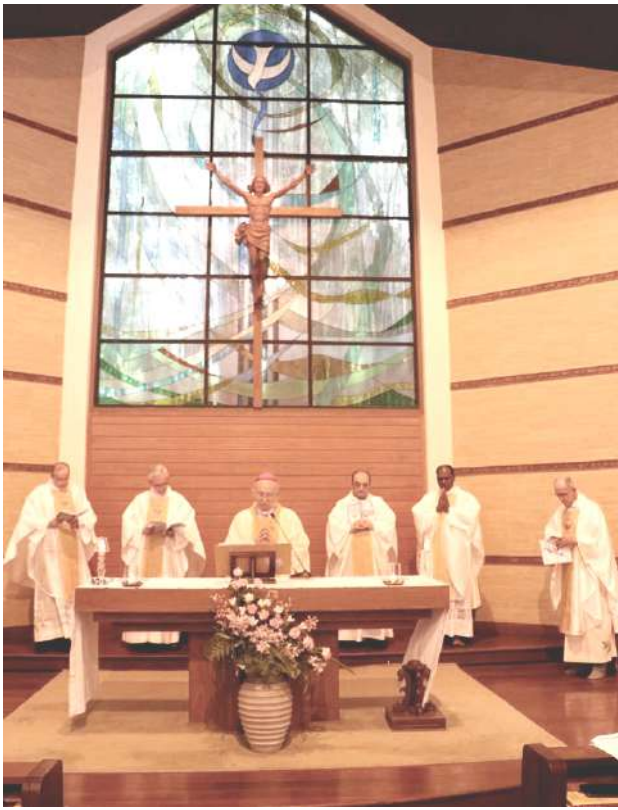
The “open up” represents more the present, and the “get up” invites us to accept and overcome the past, while the “let’s walk together” calls us rather to build a future of hope.

To do so with a new synodal style, based on listening and dialogue, being faithful to our charism, we count on the instances of discernment that the Congregation offers us. The General Chapter is one of them. A fundamental moment that covers the most relevant aspects of our ecclesial life. The experience of *walking together* reminds us that the Church is a great “missionary communion” that goes through the history of Salvation as a pilgrim People on the way to Easter.

Walking together requires a good disposition of the heart. No one goes for a walk without preparing. I will name three elements that I think are appropriate to point out. Being a synodal path, as we progress, we will mutually enrich each other, creating a constructive and hopeful synergy.

In the New Testament we find some instructions for the journey, especially if we consider those that refer to the call and the apostolic sending.

1. Saint Paul testifies to us in his letters that, in order to walk the “path” of the Lord, he himself had to go through an interior conversion that changed his life. This conversion normally accompanies the vocation that each one has received. In the second letter to Timothy we read: “**Renew** the gift of vocation that is in you” (2 Tim 1, 6). This indispensable invitation serves to get



us going as a Congregation. The call to walk together is never deduced simply from our own dignity. It is not possible to go out for a walk together with the People of God without *renewing ourselves*. In this moment of the Church and of society in which we find ourselves facing the culture of discouragement, confrontation and death, the living testimonies of the saints and prophets of our time are needed more than ever. Betharramites have to rediscover, then, the hidden "treasure", be able to sell everything to buy the field (cf. Mt 13. 43-44), be wise so as not to lose the opportunity to obtain "the precious pearl" (Mt 13.

45-46). If we renew our vocation attentive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then it will be easier to walk the path of the third millennium.

2. On the other hand, it is necessary to resume, as soon as possible, a serious discipleship that helps us to better understand the Word and to bring it to life today. The Acts of the Apostles presents us with the text of the Apostle Philip walking next to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch official who was reading the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8, 26-39). They were *walking together on the road*, but one of them was in search of happiness and the other already knew it... At one point the silence was broken and the other said to Philip: *How can I understand the word unless some man shows me?* (Acts 8. 31) And we: How can we rediscover the meaning of our Betharramite walk if we put our own ideas first and are not willing to listen with a disciple's ear? The apostle will go to meet him and *make him want* to be baptized. For the gospel to reach the peripheries, well-trained apostles are needed: simple and bold to follow in the footsteps of Jesus "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6).

3. The well-known text of the disciples of Emmaus, finally, finds Jesus becoming a *companion alongside the two apostles* who were moving away from Jerusalem. They are like an image of a disappointed, depressed Church. Putting aside foolish and clumsy discipleship will be essential to reawaken the ardour of hearts and the desire for conversion.

Walking together does not mean escaping to save your skin. It means going out together with the People of God, together with everyone, especially the

poorest and most vulnerable. Accepting to open the heart to the cry of these brothers who cannot find where to rest their heads. Because we know that the future of the Church will depend on the capacity that all the members of the People of God have to live a renewed experience of mercy towards one another.

The Church today presents us with its missionary challenges, which we cannot ignore. The healing of Creation, the comprehensive care of children and minors, a more prophetic religious life, being artisans of Peace, being welcoming to those who wander through this world under the yoke of forced migration or exclusion, etc.

Will we Betharramites be capable of assuming these challenges, or do we continue to lament as the disciples of Emmaus did before recognizing Christ in the breaking of the Bread?

I end with some words from Saint Michael in which he invites us to walk letting ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit:

"With the law of love engraved in his heart, the just man sees and appreciates what is good: he walks admirably and does much more than all that is prescribed by external rules..."

...Trained in this school, the holy women ran to the tomb of the Saviour; the apostles call them visionaries. However, they were far more inspired than the apostles and the disciples of Emmaus with their calculations and reasoning.

Love by itself leads to better paths than the rule. The primitive Church did not know the laws that now govern Christian society, and yet the multitude of the faithful had only one heart and one soul...

...They walked, then, completely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." (DS § 134)

Do not fear Betharram! Let's go for a walk!

The Lord promised to be with his own until the end of time. He, who was the one who conceived our religious family, will make of it a community of servants: *small, docile, happy and constant.*

I thank you all very much for these six years walking together in Betharram. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus continue to call many more to join the pilgrimage of our little family towards the House of the Father.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General



Homily (extract) • Solemnity of Pentecost

St Peter's basilica, Sunday 28 May 2023

[...] 2. Along with his work in creation, we see the Holy Spirit at work in the Church, beginning with the day of Pentecost. We notice, however, that the Spirit does not inaugurate the Church by providing the community with rules and regulations, but by descending upon each of the apostles: every one of them receives particular graces and different charisms. Such an abundance of differing gifts could generate confusion, but, as in creation, the Holy Spirit loves to create harmony out of diversity. The harmony of the Spirit is not a mandatory, uniform order; in the Church, there is indeed an order, but it is *"structured in accordance with the diversity of the Spirit's gifts"* (Saint Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, XVI, 39). At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends in tongues of fire: he bestows upon each person the ability to speak other languages (cf. Acts 2:4) and to understand in his or her own language what is spoken by others (cf. Acts 2:6.11). In a word, the Spirit does not create a single language, one that is the same for all. He does not eliminate differences or cultures, but harmonizes everything

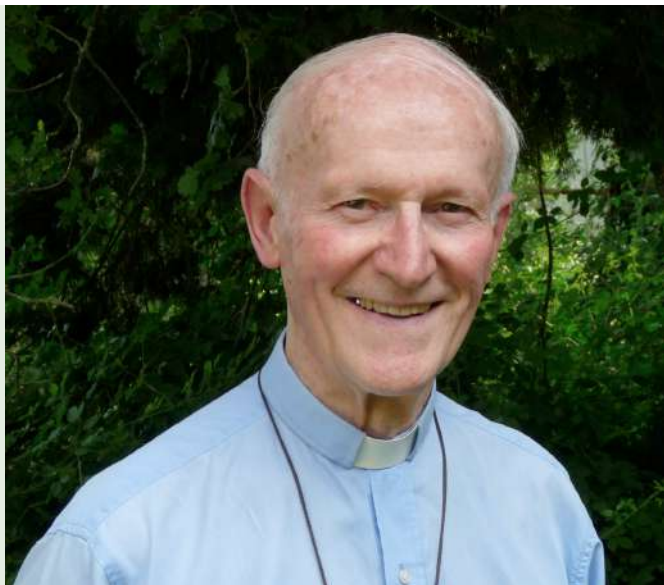
without reducing them to bland uniformity. And this must make us stop and reflect at this current time, when the temptation of "back-stepping" seeks to homogenise everything into merely apparent disciplines lacking any substance. Let us think about this: the Spirit does not begin with a clearly outlined programme, as we would, who so often become caught up in our plans and projects. No, he begins by bestowing gratuitous and superabundant gifts. Indeed, on that day of Pentecost, as the Scripture emphasizes, *"all were filled with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:4). All were filled: that is how the life of the Church began, not from a precise and detailed plan, but from the shared experience of God's love. That is how the Spirit creates harmony; he invites us to experience amazement at his love and at his gifts present in others. As Saint Paul tells us: *"There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"* (1 Cor 12:4.13). To see each of our brothers and sisters in the faith as part of the same body of which I am a member: this is the harmonious

approach of the Spirit, this is the path that he points out to us!

And the Synod now taking place is – and should be – a journey in accordance with the Spirit, not a Parliament for demanding rights and claiming needs in accordance with the agenda of the world, nor an occasion for following wherever the wind is blowing, but the opportunity to be docile to the breath of the Spirit. For on the sea of history, the Church sets sail only with him, for he is *“the soul of the Church”* (Saint Paul VI, Address to the Sacred College, 21 June 1976), the heart of synodality, the driving force of evangelization. Without him, the Church is lifeless, faith is mere doctrine, morality mere duty, pastoral work mere toil. Sometimes we hear so-called thinkers or theologians, who suggest seemingly mathematical theories that leave us cold because they lack the Spirit within. With the Spirit, on the other hand, faith is life,

the love of the Lord convinces us, and hope is reborn. Let us put the Holy Spirit back at the centre of the Church; otherwise, our hearts will not be consumed by love for Jesus, but by love for ourselves. Let us put the Spirit at the start and heart of the Synod’s work. For *“it is he above all whom the Church needs today! Let us say to him each day: Come!”* (cf. ID., General Audience, 29 November 1972). And let us journey together because, as at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit loves to descend when *“all come together”* (cf. Acts 2:1). Yes, to manifest himself to the world, he chose the time and place where all were gathered together. The People of God, in order to be filled with the Spirit, must therefore journey together, *“do Synod”*. That is how harmony in the Church is renewed: by journeying together with the Spirit at the centre. Brothers and sister, let us build harmony in the Church! ■





Paths for the future

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Mgr. Pierre Molères

In Betharram, on May 14, Mgr. Pierre Molères, Bishop of the Diocese of Bayonne, Lescar and Oloron from 1986 to 2008, presided at Holy Mass for the feast of our founder and the 100th anniversary of his beatification. In his homily, he also proposed some reflections on the future of our religious family.

We celebrate on this day the centenary of the beatification of St Michael Garicoïts, founder of the missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Betharram, and spiritual master wise in guiding souls. Thank you to the Fathers of Betharram for their kind invitation and welcome to the pilgrims on this day, particularly the youngest, the 25 young confirmande from Oloron and the 60 young people from Ariège with their companions who came to this beautiful sanctuary to propose their intentions to Saint Michael Garicoïts. My purpose this morning is not to recall its history, but conscious of the historical turning point initiated by the Congregation of Betharram, I would like to bring to light what should remain always and everywhere of the spiritual heritage

of its holy founder and, starting from its charisma, to map out some paths for the future.

Let's say first of all that Father Michael knew how to patiently organise his new family by always making God's will and plans take precedence over his own plans, despite any difficulties.

The Gospel of the day has just reminded us that Jesus, after a failure in two cities where the Jewish religion was taught, did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by sadness and discouragement; he speaks to his Father with serenity and joy. He knows that his Father loves people; that He does not want to condemn them but on the



contrary raise them up to Himself by sending them His Son as a guide; Jesus seems to be the only one who really knows the Father, as well as all those humble people who entrust themselves to Him without thinking of themselves as the best; Jesus said to them, *"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest; take on my yoke, put yourself in my school, for I am gentle and humble of heart; my burden is easy to bear, and my load light."* Saint Michael took this message seriously; for him, God is One in Three, a unique and united family, a communion of three persons who have always loved each other; he goes so far as to say *"God is dissolved in charity"*, every baptised person is called to have this sense of communion, this sense of mutuality of which the thinkers of the time spoke, this sense of Church-family, of which the letter to the Colossians in the second

reading portrayed: *"Support one another; forgive each other as the Lord forgave you, and above all practice kindness and charity; this is a belt that allows you to be very united"*. All of this was important for Michael Garicoits who wrote: *"I will work on imitating and perfecting in myself and others, especially in those entrusted to me, this unity of the three Divine Persons."* Two pillars shape his work, meditated on at length in the burning bush of Betharram:

- the first is the motto of Christ coming into this world: *"Here I am Father to do your will"*. Michael made it his own, but added his famous signature *"without delay, without reservation, without turning back, out of love"*;

- the second pillar is his decision to dwell in the heart of Jesus, which for him is the synopsis of Christianity, so that his heartbeat may give rhythm to his spiritual life, and supply blood

to his missionary action and that of his family in Betharram.

That said, let us now clear the **paths for the future** that present themselves to this generous Congregation from today for tomorrow.

- The first, clearly, is the handover: the current lack of French and European vocations means that providentially religious vocations from the African, Asian and South American continents are giving a more diversified face to your Congregation. Initially rooted in Bearn and France; a positive development, on the condition that this spatial deployment is done in humility and disinterestedness on both sides; your leaders are working on this with discernment and realism. You have heard the first reading: a young Jew in his twenties, from a wealthy family, prays in the Temple; suddenly God shows Himself to him; Isaiah, as he is called, becomes aware of his unworthiness and becomes afraid; then an angel takes a burning ember from the altar and brushes his lips with it, a sign of purification; a voice from heaven then asks, "*Whom shall I send?*" Isaiah replies: "*Here I am, Lord, send me.*" Are there no more children, young people today, capable of reacting in this way? In Europe, in France, in Béarn, in Ariège? You have the answer. In any case,



there are young people elsewhere who do it.

- A second path consists in weaving fraternal bonds between you, from one end of your Congregation to the other, because your founding father wanted it to be a real family where it would be good to recharge your batteries, to exchange as brothers, to rekindle his physical, moral and spiritual forces; you are incarnating his desire by living and proposing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius through the Spiritual Doctrine of Michael Garicoits.

- A third path is to ensure the maintenance of the missionary spirit thanks to the spirit of Pentecost, by keeping you free from any tribalism, cliques, jealousy or from getting too comfortable; there is so much to do in the countryside and the suburbs, in technical and scientific circles! Also avoid a downward spiral which is always possible: becoming socio-

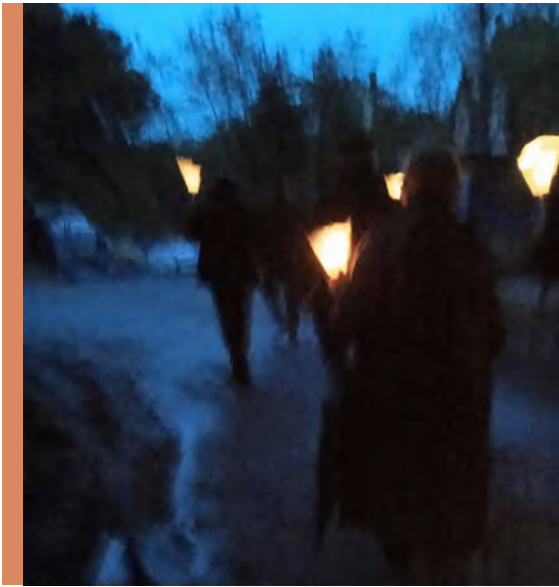
cultural animators forgetful of Christ or, on the contrary, people entrenched in a disembodied religion; which is not your case now; your religious vows lived in community do not allow any compromise on these points; they put you back on the right path every day through prayer, examination of conscience and brotherly correction.

- A fourth pathway consists in finding and keeping your roots, your interior geography, in 4 places: your country of origin, your place of sending, this founding place of Betharram and in the Holy Land, the country of Jesus where the humble Palestinian Carmelite St Mariam has trained you, and where prestigious biblical scholars of your Congregation have taught you the need for both in-depth study and daily meditation of the Holy Scriptures. But do not forget to find in the ancient tradition of Betharram at least two ways to enrich and even renew your missionary inspiration; I am alluding to the popular Marian story of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding her child, or handing a young girl, who was drowning in the river, a branch as a last resort; the second popular story is of the heavy cross of your Calvary which had fallen to the ground, and then was found upright; these two deeply human and meaningful scenes should be imprinted on the hearts of each of you, priest, consecrated or lay person, to inspire your missionary calling in the rural

world and in technical circles, to uplift those wounded by life, particularly children and young people.

Finally, a fifth pathway entails following in the footsteps of your founder, always putting God first and seeking to accomplish God's will in everything. Michael the centurion said he wanted to "*do it as a Zouave*"; he imagined his religious family "*as a flying camp of elite soldiers, ready to run at the first signal from their leaders, wherever they were called*". The dynamic pauper of Ibarre also said; "*Let us do like God who does everything on a grand scale, he who created the blade of grass with the same care he took to create man or angel*". Yes, doing everything with care and magnanimity, including for each of you, having the will to allow yourselves to be shaped by the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and the Spiritual Doctrine, directing your existence towards the ultimate encounter with God, without secularising your end of life.

These 5 paths could serve as a road map for those who wish to live out the charism of Betharram. On 14th May 1863 at 3 o'clock in the morning, St Michael Garicoits passed away murmuring: "*My heart is ready, Lord, have mercy on me.*" One last time the sunflower turned towards the sun or better, received the gift of light of the Transfiguration; the shepherd from Ibarre was going to meet Jesus, the Lamb of his heart,



On Sunday 14 May, the religious of the Vicariate of France-Spain gathered in Betharram to celebrate Vespers and for a Holy hour of adoration together with around forty parishioners from the parish of Saint Michael Garicoïts in Coarrazze-Nay.

Then, at 9 pm, a candlelight vigil took place in the Chapel of the Resurrection where the Founder's body remained for 60 years, before being exhumed on the occasion of the beatification on May 10, 1923.

The rosary was recited, with meditation on the texts of the Founder.

the Good Shepherd, in the sheepfold of heaven; the friend of St Elisabeth Bichier des Ages, founder of the Daughters of the Cross, was going to find his counsellor next to the Virgin Mary. As for him, the courageous one, he paced his last straight line

exhausted but confident, sure of finding his friend Jesus, after his hard, Easter walk, ready to wash his feet by saying to him: "At last, blessed by my Father, you behold, all that is mine is yours; enter into the joy of our home, of our Eucharist." ■



A new finally professed member



Br. Emmanuel Assanvo
AGNIMAN scj

On the last May 28th, in the parish of the Annunciation of Langhirano (Italy), the Superior General, Fr. Gustavo Agin scj, received the perpetual vows of Br Emmanuel Agniman Assanvo scj, an Ivoirian religious, welcomed for two

years in the Vicariate of Italy, to prepare himself to follow Jesus-Christ for ever in the footsteps of St Michael Garicoïts.

Br Emmanuel tells us his itinerary since his first encounter with Betharram ten years ago.

I was born on May 15th 1981 and my diocese of origin is in Grand Bassam. From a family of 6 children (three sisters and two brothers), I grew up in a wholly catholic family. With a diploma in data-processing, my vocation was born from animation encounters of the vocational camps and recollections, directed by the Sisters of the Christian Doctrine of the parish of Saint Peter of South-Niangon. These Sisters succeeded in leading me on the way of vocational reflection. So, it is during one of these meetings proposed by the Sisters of the Christian Doctrine that I happened to know the Congregation of the Fathers of Betharram in 2013. Touched by the vocation of the Congregation, I joyfully set my luggage in the formation house of Adiopodoumé. After three years of postulancy, in Abidjan, two years of novitiate, including one canonical in the community of Betharram, and

the other one apostolical in Dabakala (Ivory Coast), I was admitted to profess the first vows on September 8th 2018 in Abidjan. As a scholastic, I benefitted of three years of studies in theology in the West Africa Catholic University in Abidjan. In the frame of preparing the perpetual vows, I was asked to join the community of Langhirano (Italy). Indeed, in 2013, when I was crossing the mythic gate of the Adiopodoumé community, I knew nothing whatever about religious life. Along the years, I have discovered the immense joy to follow Jesus more closely in the Congregation of the Religious of Betharram. Immersing myself in my memory to find elements marking my progress, it emerged that my interest for the Church and the Congregation of Betharram has become more intense in spite of the vicissitudes of life. To put it differently, I have always sought to be happy where I am living. This ability to adapt myself



has enabled me to live in various communities. My wealth, it is to acknowledge my poverty. Because the poor are evangelizing through their joy and solidarity: Getting out of oneself, going towards the others, listening to them, accompanying them, sharing their values and those of Jesus-Christ and of his Gospel as a Betharramite, "Go out in order to share", what a beautiful life! Altogether, if it is true that I look robust and strong, I confess that on this way, I have experienced God's mercy which melts and transforms the person who lets himself liberate by

the Christ, Jesus. Today, I am feeling totally disarmed, wholly given to God. A part of my life has been linked to the pastoral of the young people and the promotion of vocation. "You have seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced" (Jr. 20,7). It is an attraction, a desire of spiritual things, a flame of unconditional love, that which liberates the captive man I was, and leads me back permanently to the light of Saint Michael Garicoïts: "Here I am". ■ **Emmanuel Assanvo scj**

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

INDIA - SHOBHANA SHAAKHA, June 6th, 2023 First profession

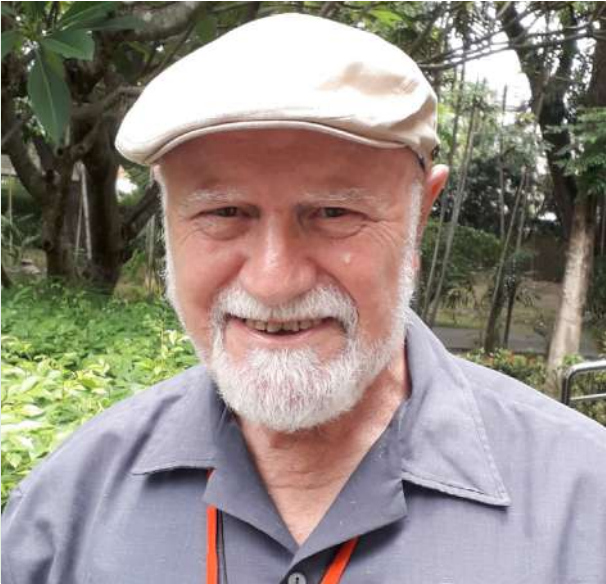
On the Solemnity of HOLY SPIRIT two of our brothers, **Br. Vijol and Br. Sebin** made their first profession in the hands of Rev Fr. Enrico Frigerio, Regional Superior.

These two brothers were guided in their noviciate by Fr. Pascal Ravi scj. The Eucharist was presided by Fr. Enrico. Fr. Arul, Regional Vicar, was present and the Vicariate Fathers, neighbouring community religious and the family members participated in the celebrations.

INDIA - MANGALORE, June 6th, 2023 Ordination to the Diaconate

On the Feast Day of Visitation, there was added joy in the Vicariate of India, since **Br. Stephen R was ordained as Deacon** by Most. Rev. Peter Paul Saldanha, the Bishop of Mangalore diocese. Rev. Fr. Enrico Frigerio scj, Regional Superior, presented the candidate for ordination, the Regional Vicar and other fathers of the Vicariate were present.

The family members of Dn. Stephen were delighted to be part of their grace filled event. The neighboring community religious, teachers, benefactors were also present at the event. Under the guidance and leadership of Fr. Vipin the community arranged all the programs meticulously.



Mgr. Jacinto Vera

– first bishop of Uruguay –
and Betharram

|
Fr. Angelo Recalcati scj

On May 6, the Church of Uruguay saw a memorable event: the proclamation as Blessed of Jacinto Vera, the first bishop of Uruguay. The celebration took place on the Olympic Grandstand of the Centennial Stadium, the main soccer stadium in the country, in Montevideo.

Uruguayan parishioners were invited and attended *en masse*, despite bad weather forecasts. At one point the rain beat down on everyone, but no one moved from their place. The people filled the Olympic grandstand, while the priests and the guests were on the terrace, in front of the podium.

For us Betharramites, it was a particularly significant celebration, because of what the new Blessed represented for the Congregation in America.

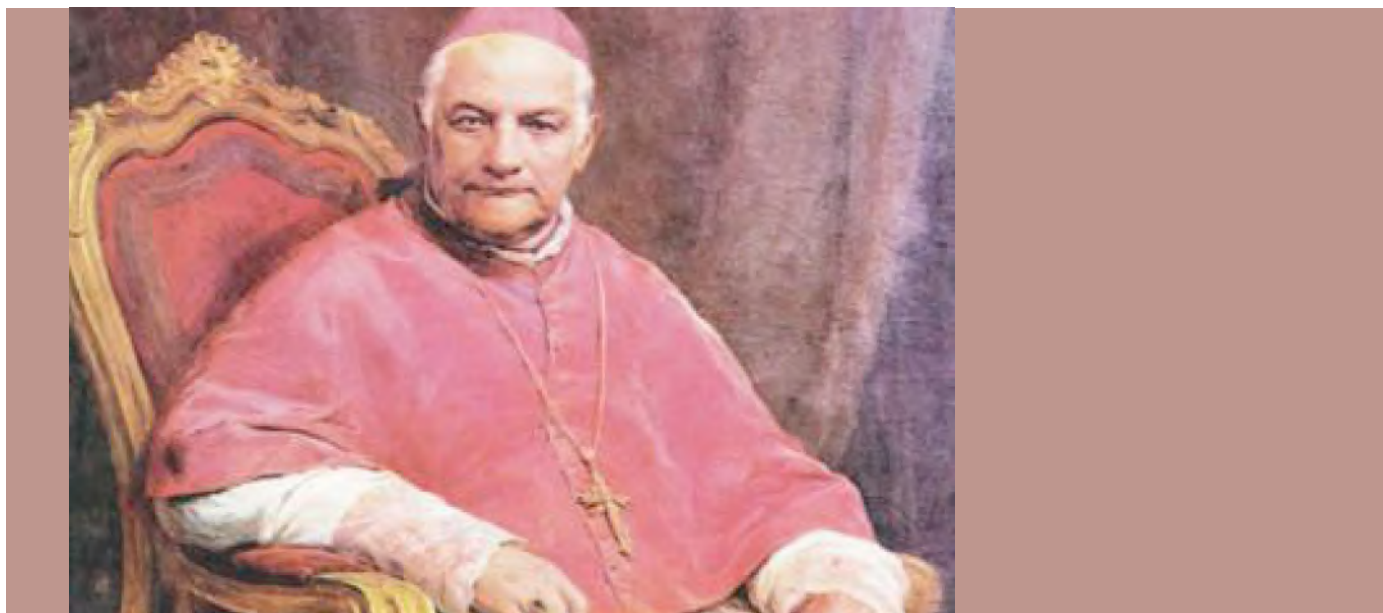
Bishop Jacinto Vera, who had to organize a diocese from scratch, counting only on the good will of Catholics, lived in a time of fratricidal struggles between opposing political

factions (whites and reds) and it was not easy for him to remain impartial; however, he was never indifferent, and at all times he worked for peace and harmony.

In 1859 he was named Vicar Apostolic and in 1865 he was the first Bishop of the new diocese of Montevideo. Already as apostolic vicar he had met Betharramites who had preached missions in his lands. The bishop was known throughout the Uruguayan territory. He visited the parishes of his new diocese three times, preaching missions, administering confirmations and baptisms, regularizing marriages... on horseback or in a carriage, sparing no effort.

For this task, he also asked Betharramites of Buenos Aires for assistance. It was at that time that Fr. Guimon scj preached several missions in Uruguay and was highly appreciated.

Political conflicts there were almost a disease and ended up affecting the clergy as well. To resolve the serious



divisions, Bishop Vera summoned all the clergy for a penitential and reconciliation retreat. Father Guimon was in charge of preaching and he did so with such passion and enthusiasm that, according to a witness of that time, the priests ended up embracing each other, reconciled.

But the political conflicts continued and the bishop had to confront the government of the day, due to disputes over the appointment of parish priests that affected the freedom of the Church.

The tension was such that the government banished him and, along with him and for the same reason, Fr. Harbustan scj, who had been the first parish priest of the Immaculate Conception parish and the superior of the Betharramite community in Uruguay, (known as *Los Vascos*, "the Basques") was banished. Bishop Vera, after a few years, returned to Uruguay. Also Fr. Harbustan returned but in 1873 he went to Buenos Aires for an assembly of superiors and there

he died. Others then followed the Betharramite adventure on the eastern bank of the Río de la Plata.

I was remembering and praying all this history, during the celebration, in which many other events in the life of Jacinto Vera were also remembered; for me it was a family celebration, of Betharram. Betharram had been accompanying Blessed Jacinto Vera in moments of great difficulties and suffering; he had not shed his blood but had paid his fair share of pain and suffering to help the Church of this land, the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

Even before the community was founded, Fr. Larrouy scj, along with other Betharramites, had come to the aid of cholera victims in 1857.

With the beatification of Jacinto Vera, the entire Church of Uruguay feels comforted and, (why not admit it?) even a little proud of what is seen as a recognition for all the Christians of Uruguay, among whom we Betharramites have our place. ■

Father Jean-Baptiste OLÇOMENDY scj

Lantabat Béhaune, 9 November 1926 – Betharram, 12 May 2023 (France)

From the homily for the funeral of Father Jean-Baptiste Olçomendy scj

"Set into the right way gently!"
The ministry of the religious-priest is to solace, to comfort, but also to encourage and incite to progress, so that each one finds the good way, but to do so without brutality or severity, but sweetly and delicately as our Father did, putting into practice the counsels of our Founder Saint Michael Garicoïts: *"The spirit of Jesus is a spirit of meekness, humility, devotedness, to attract the sinners sweetly to repent and imitate him"*. It is also what Pope Francis recommends: *"not to control grace, but facilitate it"*. A whole art asked from us in our time, when faith is at risk to fall too low because we are too tepid, as we are going to sing it in a moment with this song to Saint Michael.

Father Olçomendy lived this quality of ministry, specially in the clinic of Saint-Palais where several of our parents received the sacrament of the sick from his hands. This almonership had nourished in him a special attention to the nursing staff, which he showed here in our Nursing Home.

Not to have any illusion about oneself. Our brother had the lucidity, not such a frequent quality today, where there is a risk either to live



in a perpetual complaint while discrediting oneself, or in exaggerating one's own value. We have appreciated in our brother this happy medium recommended by our Founder. To acknowledge one's weakness and frailties, while acknowledging the Lord showers his blessings on us, it is indeed the humility asked from us; to acknowledge that all our value is due to the Lord without being jealous of what the others are.

To hold one's place "in the limits of one's office", as Fr. Garicoïts says, while being a servant, as the Gospel we have chosen in the present circumstances recommends us. For Jesus, the first one, it is the man who knows how to take the last place while serving and promoting his fellow creature. Our brother never

claimed an office but he served, happy of what was asked from him in this "Etchecopar" home of Saint-Palais where apparently he was predestinated as his Christian name was also Auguste. His service also led him to relay Fathers Larramendy, Ithurralde and Darritchon, to take special care at Ibarre, of the Garacotchea house, of the church, of the Home of the Pilgrims, with precise instructions transmitted to the "*Friends of Michael Garicoïts*" Association, and to our community of Saint-Palais, who relayed him to animate Ibarre with its pilgrimage, our Betharramite source.

I return to his affection for his family, specially balanced, caring about all those who originated in Lantabat to various degrees, and also about those who joined this family by marriages ; we regretted a little not to be able to celebrate last June the 70th anniversary of his presbyteral ordination, but already Fr Jean-Baptiste was feeling the physical interior sickness which was growing and was to forbid his daily walks to the Calvary.

Without pushing himself forward, he had more than one string to his bow; when we were children, we admired how nimble he was when playing the pelota with his Argentinian racket. I was startled to see his skill when he used his camera during the recycling in the Holy Land in 1988 and at the top of mount Sinai; his pedagogic talents to initiate the

youngsters to play the trumpet were well-known, as his liveliness when he animated birthday parties in the Nursing Home; he could also show some impatience in front of a computer too slow to his taste, or of Nets not wide enough!

A pleasant companion, but also a faithful religious, making his oraisons, as some of the sheets discovered on his desk witness it, or eucharists celebrated with a heart widened by numerous intentions, as his mass notebook proves it, and his unfailing participation to the prayers of the community! But also the sacrament of the sick asked a few days before the Holy Week, but also the absolution he asked me two days before his death! An unusual lucidity in front of death he felt very near, but with serenity; I wish we could have the same serenity!

And now, let us trust him to God and Our Lady of Betharram, so that they present him to Jesus, meek and humble-hearted, to whom he consecrated his life, specially his 76 years of Betharramite religious life. "*Good and faithful servant, enter the joy of your Lord*"! ■

Fr. Laurent Bacho scj

In memoriam...

On 5 June, **Mrs Cécile Dégni Dohon**, sister of Fr Théophile Dégni N'Guessan SCJ, Vicar Regional in Ivory Coast, died at the age of 60. We express to Fr Théophile and to his dear ones our condolences and we promise to pray for his dear sister.

The Heart of Jesus and Fr. Etchecopar

| *Fr. Gaspar*

Fernández Pérez scj



Upon reading Fr Etchecopar's Letters, I find that he has used the word "heart" 2,386 times, written in both the upper- and the lower case. When in capitals, he is referring to the Hearts of either St Joseph, or the Virgin Mary or of Jesus. In the lower case, he means the human organ – sometimes when discussing diseases of the heart – and to that place in the human body which is the seat of affection (the heart reveals the intensity of its own affective life); other mentions he makes refer to the heart of our Founder.

Other than in his Correspondence, Fr Etchecopar also devotes four of his sermons to the Heart of Jesus. In none of the writings of St Michael, do we find so many times the word "heart" or the expression "Heart of Jesus", contrary to Fr Etchecopar.

St Michael however was well aware of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. This devotion gained renewed impetus in the 19th Century under the influence of the French School, which reinstated

every individual's relationship with the Word Incarnate and considered that the heart was central to the person. Applying this notion to the Heart of Jesus means the Heart of Jesus is identified with His Person. St Michael supported this devotion by creating a Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, at the request of Miss Jeanne Dagoret. Together with Jean Jauretze¹, he contributed to a manual, in the Basque language, which suggested devotional texts for the use of members of the Confraternity. However, it is strange that it was not St Michael Garicoits who gave the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the order he founded, but Mgr Lacroix, Bishop of Bayonne, when he delivered the 1941 Constitutions to St Michael which he had himself drawn up.

Two currents of thought of the French School stand out and both

1) Saint Michel had known Abbé Jean Jauretze as chaplain at the Minor Seminary of Laressore, where he himself was a professor shortly before his ordination.

made an extensive impact across every diocese of France.

The first was initiated by St Francis de Sales, who founded the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary (the Visitandines) with St Jane Frances de Chantal. This Order of nuns moved to Paray-le-Monial in 1626 at the invitation of the Jesuits. This is where Margaret Mary d'Alacoque (later canonised) entered the Order on 20 June 1671 and where she experienced several mystical encounters with Jesus (between 1673 and 1675), in which He showed her His Heart and gave her messages and devotional practices to be shared with the faithful baptised.

The second came from the Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, Founder of the Oratory of Jesus, to which St John Eudes belonged. St John was a great missionary who later founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary for the formation of seminarists. St

John Eudes devoted his attention to the Heart of Mary then to the Heart of Jesus and finally to them both; he wrote the texts of the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, inspired by St Bonaventure, St Francis de Sales and Cardinal Bérulle. On 20 October 1665, this Feast was celebrated for the first time in his Congregation's communities, eight years before the apparitions at Paray-le-Monial. Both Fr Duvignau in *A 19th Century Spiritual Master* and Fr Jean-Luc Morin scj in *The Heart of Jesus and St Michael Garicoits* attribute the doctrine of the Sacred Heart in St Michael to this current of thought.

For various reasons, the impetus initiated in the second half of the 17th Century lost momentum and the commandments received from the Sacred Heart of Jesus by St Margaret Mary d'Alacoque were not fulfilled until the middle of the 19th Century,

Construction of the Basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart in Paris (Montmartre), photo of 1890



at which point the devotion itself underwent an even stronger revival, to the point even of acquiring a political dimension. Several events bear this out: 1844, foundation of the Apostleship of Prayer; 1856, Pius IX extends the Feast of the Sacred Heart to the whole of the Catholic Church; 1861, Fr Ramière SJ, founded the periodical "*Messenger of the Sacred Heart*"; 1863, France was at last consecrated to the Sacred Heart, two centuries after Jesus had entrusted this task to St Margaret Mary; 1864, beatification of Margaret Mary d'Alacoque; 1870, the "national vow" was made, at Paray-le-Monial, to erect a basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart, as Jesus had asked of St Margaret Mary; 1872, the Cardinal of Paris approved the vote; 1873, the National Assembly [France's lower chamber of parliament] passed a law whereby the construction of the Basilica was deemed to be 'of national interest'; 16 June 1875, the first stone was laid; 15 June 1891, Cardinal Richaud inaugurated the Basilica; and on 16 October 1929 in Paris, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart was consecrated.

Fr Etchecopar was engaged in this movement of renewal of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which spread throughout the second half of the 19th Century. Based on the reflections of St Michael Garicoits, he took this opportunity to go further in deepening the spirituality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an aspect which the Congregation needed to make its identity more coherent. Let us note a

few contributions to the development of this spirituality:

1. The heart is the centre of every dimension of the person of Jesus. We find expressions such as: *the Heart of the Divine Child; the Heart of our Love Incarnate and Crucified; the Love of His Pierced Heart; the Heart of His Divine Son; the Very Heart of the Heavenly Father; an embrace in the Heart of the risen Jesus... ; in the Heart of our Divine Saviour; the Heart of our Divine Master; the Divine Heart of Jesus.*

2. The open Heart from which comes everything for us and to which everything must return. A place of unity, where we are all to be found: "*This heart calling from within, from which we came and to which we should give thanks for everything, is the foundation on which we must build without ceasing and be raised ever higher.*" (RL. 2)

3. It is thus that he describes the Heart of Jesus in his sermon delivered on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 7 July 1861:

"What is this heart?

It is the heart of our God, in which are enclosed all the treasures of the wisdom and science of God. It is an infinitely holy heart which the Angels revere and adore. It is an infinitely perfect heart which gains every favour of the Most Holy Trinity. It is an infinitely generous heart which has taken on all the sins of the world and which has been broken for our iniquities. It is an

invincible heart which has borne all the weight of God's justice and which has disarmed it, overcoming every one of its rigours".

4. In his Letters he mentions the name of Blessed Margaret Mary d'Alacoque five times². In a letter to the fathers and brothers in America, he also refers to "the Blessed Margaret Mary" and acknowledges the new impetus which devotion to the Sacred Heart has acquired, dating back to the 17th Century: "For this, dear Fathers and Brothers, we must suffer much and suffer always... But as the Blessed Margaret Mary would have said, in the Heart of Jesus, all is transformed into gentleness; and also do we not get our just reward, seeing how far extends the Kingdom of His Heart, when - added the Saint - that same Heart chose for His Apostles, men who were poor, looked down on, destined to be the sign spoken against?" (Betharram, 18/6/1886)

It seems that St Michael Garicoits never mentions Sister Margaret Mary by name.

5. A prayer to the Heart of Jesus at the end of the 1861 Sermon: the prayer to the Sacred Heart in his report on the celebration of Holy Week in Jerusalem, reported in detail in the Letter to Fr Victor Bourdenne, Jerusalem, 2 April 1893:

2) To his sister Julie, Betharram, 28/6/1871; to Fr Victor Bourdenne, Bethlehem, 14/5/1893 and Rome, 28/11/1893; to Fr Dulong, Betharram, 3/2/1896.

"Lord Jesus, my Lord and invincible master!! Here I am! here we all are! in the wake of our Founder, always putting ourselves last; always working; living and dying within the limits of our tasks, small, submissive, constant, content; that is the Law You made and followed which, hence-forth is our Law as much as Yours... We want it because it was what and how You wanted it, in the centre of our hearts: Legem in medio cordis³. Like You, we want to fulfil this law by our struggle with as sole weapons Truth and Love, legem in medio cordis; and always by love, rather than by any other means, in accordance with Fr Garicoits' motto. But above all, we want this in order to earn Your love and to gain 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 et pars mea in aeternum⁴. May this, O Infinite Mercy, be the great grace of this pilgrimage for me and for all those dear to me!"

6. In five consecutive letters, he makes plain to his addressees his indignation at the following fact:

"The devil has set up one of the most infernal Masonic Lodges of all time, right here in Paray-le-Monial. There is an engraving of the Sacred Heart which has this blasphemous caption: Execrable Heart of Jesus! On the Cross, Jesus prayed for His

3) Your law, my God, is deep in my heart. (Ps 39,8)

4) My heart's rock, my portion, God for ever! (Ps 73,26)

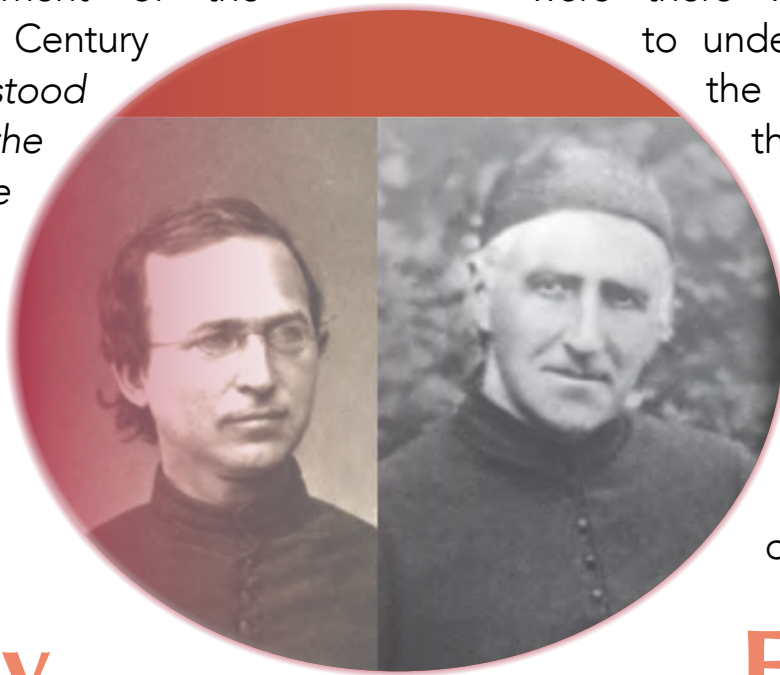
executioners, let us pray for them."

I believe that the writings of Fr Etchécopar are a gold mine which we should exploit, thereby deepening our Betharramite spirituality. For him, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the core of this spirituality which he develops on the basis of Fr Garicoits' vision, but in which he includes the added value produced by the renewal of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which peaked in the second half of the 19th Century.

I believe that devotion to the Sacred Heart has become way of life which continues to grow with the encouragement of the 20th and 21st Century Popes. *'Understood in the light of the Scriptures, the term "Sacred*

Heart of Jesus" denotes the entire mystery of Christ, the totality of His being, and His person considered in its most intimate essential: Son of God, uncreated wisdom; infinite charity, principal of the salvation and sanctification of mankind. The "Sacred Heart" is Christ, the Word Incarnate, Saviour, intrinsically containing, in the Spirit, an infinite divine-human love for the Father and for His brothers.' (Directory On Popular Piety and the Liturgy, 9 April 2001, No. 166).

We should explore this gold mine. It would be very interesting, were there willing volunteers, to undertake a study of the literary, linguistic, theological, spiritual and psychological aspects of Fr Etchecopar's personality, based on his writings. Anyone ready to take it on? ■



Happy

Feast

of the Sacred Heart



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