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A word from the superior general

**“Be open up, arise, let us walk
together!” [II]**

“Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around.” (John 5.1-16)

Dear Betharramites:

In this Easter season, we continue to reflect on the proposed theme, as we walk together towards the General Chapter in Chiang Mai. This time we will do it with the second exhortation: **“Arise.”**

It is a word cited many times in both old and new testaments. When it appears in the gospels, in the letters of Paul and even in the Acts of the Apostles, it is always to encourage us to transcend all kinds of dejection, problems or conditions of life. Placed on the lips of Jesus, it has an indescribable force that heals and saves.

In this case, it is that of the Gospel of John, where there

is a healing. Other features appear too that can help us to discern together. The story even invites us to take a look at the *past*, to give new meaning to what we have experienced with a new, strengthened and more generous attitude.

In fact, the text of Jn 5.1-16 begins with one of life's great ironies: *a man lying on his back for 38 years, with healing just one step away, but with the torment of not being able to achieve it...*

The pool of "Bethesda" (in hebrew "House of mercy") was located next to the temple. The text describes how the blind, lame and paralyzed would come to it. In other words, excluded people without hope, without horizons, without being able to fend for themselves. Many sick people gathered there, but Jesus is going to choose a case that we could define as "desperate". It is the only case in this gospel in which Jesus seeks out a the sick person and addresses him. The initiative of Jesus begins with a question that is not rhetorical: *Do you want to be well again?...* We can put ourselves in the place of the paralytic and imagine hearing the voice of Jesus asking us the same question. *Do you want to be healed?* And some of would ask ourselves 'healed of what?' Jesus does not judge us, but we must allow ourselves to be challenged with humility by his word. We human beings are very good at denying our illnesses, our dark side. We try to integrate it..., but many times we don't know how... *Do you want to be well again?...* He asks because there is, sometimes, in us, a certain lethargy to which we become accustomed over the years... It's as if we get used to a situation of dejection.

This is how this sick man has lived, totally unable to overcome his misfortune for 38 years. Aware of his impotence, he tells Jesus: I have to immerse myself into the pool but... *"another always gets there first" ...* Apparently, not everything is his responsibility. He also tells him: *"I don't have anyone..."* He is a person immersed in his own loneliness, and he is aware of it. The mercy of the heart of Jesus cannot bear to see him like this. Jesus will be the voice that moves him, the force that empowers him, the hand that helps him rise. As often happens in the Gospel of John, the dialogue with Jesus provokes the person to open his heart: **"Arise"**: Jesus awakens the dream that exists in the paralytic person. The paralytic did not need to be immersed in the water. He needed, rather, the living water of Jesus Christ. Jesus shows him where true salvation is, and makes him get up and move. There

are three verbs, three actions that break the law of death that was in him: "Get up", "pick up your sleeping-mat" and "walk around".

Curiously, this sign will arouse a triple controversy in the temple: 1. It was a Sabbath and the law did not allow certain activities... The Jews do not pay attention to the fact that the sick person is cured and they say *"you are not allowed to carry your stretcher"*. 2. They ask *"Who was it?"* The healed does not know him. Later, he names him, and that will be a big problem for Jesus... he meets Jesus again and Jesus tells him: *"Sin no more, so that something worse does not happen to you."* He does not threaten him with a disease. The "worst" thing is to lose the eternal Salvation that Jesus brings you. He invites him to take responsibility for himself, to believe in Christ. 3. However, from then on, they begin to persecute him: *"because he did these things on the Sabbath"*, *"because he makes himself equal to God."*

We Betharramites want to walk together, but we will not be able to if we are trapped by our past. It is a past that we have honoured many many times, (why deny it?) But we have felt its weight, mired in great paradoxes that have caused us pain, shame or perplexity.

In the above text it is Jesus who twice takes the initiative and questions the sick man. *"Do you want to be healed?"* *"Sin no more..."* Jesus himself is that "healing", that "health" (a word that appears six times in this episode).

Let us be healed by Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Father. **Jesus is the healer**, the giver of his own life. Jesus not only wants to heal, but *he wants us to discover him, to be witnesses of his love.*

There I see a great challenge for Betharram. That is to say: not denying the wounds of the past, not waiting forever by the pool; but accepting the healing proposed to us by the One who has come so that we may have life and abundant life.

The General Chapter is an occasion to honour our past with gratitude and to build on what was done well, to do what has not been done and to improve what has been done badly. All this under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; without complacent or self-referential attitudes, but assuming our responsibility as Betharramite religious, trustingly placing everything in the hands of the Father.

Let us remember Saint Michael Garicoits this month, who also wanted us to be responsible and joyful co-operators of the Holy Spirit:

"My God! How true that I had never fully considered or understood (you) during all my studies! Is it strange that my life has been so useless and that everything around me has been marked by sterility? The salvation of souls depends, then, on us. We are the ones who must save them, placing them, or rather helping them to place themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The miracle of Cana teaches us the whole economy of the salvation of souls. What was necessary to perform this wonder? Let the servants fill the jars of the house. That cooperation was needed; Our Lord requested it; cooperation, in fact, very little, since it contributed nothing more than water, but necessary cooperation, despite all human reasoning. As soon as the servants filled the jars to the brim, God in his turn came with all his power and changed the tasteless water into delicious wine."(DS 332 c.)

I wish you a very happy feast of our Father Saint Michael Garicoits!

FOR COMMUNITY REFLECTION:

- How do you characterize the last 38 years of our congregation?
- Is there an illness or disease in Betharram that we have become accustomed to without wanting to...?
- As a Betharrmite: how do you interpret the healing word of Jesus who approaches us and tells us today: Betharram "Get up, take your stretcher and walk"?

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General



2019: Apostolic Journey of his Holiness to Thailand | Speech to the bishops of Thailand • *Sampran, November 2019*

[...] You are living in the midst of a multicultural and multi-religious continent, with great beauty and prosperity, but troubled at the same time by poverty and exploitation at various levels. Rapid technological advancements can open up immense possibilities that make life easier, but can result in the growth of consumerism and materialism, especially among young people. You have taken upon yourselves the concerns of your people: the scourge of drugs and human trafficking, the care of great numbers of migrants and refugees, poor working conditions and the exploitation experienced by many labourers, as well as economic and social inequality between rich and poor.

In the midst of these tensions stands the pastor who struggles and intercedes with his people and for his people. The memory of the first missionaries who preceded us with courage, joy and extraordinary stamina can help us take stock of our present situation and mission from a much broader, much more transformative perspective. [...]

As we contemplate missionary progress in these lands, one of the first lessons we learn is to be confident in the knowledge that it is the Holy Spirit himself who goes before us and gathers us together. The Holy Spirit is the first to invite the Church to go forth to all those places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed, bringing the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities and cultures (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 74). Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit arrives in advance of missionaries and remains with them. The power of the Holy Spirit sustained and motivated the Apostles and countless missionaries not to discount any land, people, culture or situation. [...] They did not expect a foreign culture to receive the Gospel easily; rather, they plunged into these new realities, convinced of the beauty of which they were bearers. All life has value in the eyes of the Master. They were bold and courageous because they knew that in the first place the Gospel is a gift to be shared with and for everyone [...]. Three months ago, I received a visit from a French missionary who

has been working for forty years in the north of Thailand, among the tribes. He came with a group of twenty or twenty-five people, all mothers and fathers, young people, not more than twenty-five years old. He himself had baptized them, the first generation, and now he was baptizing their children. One could think: you have given your life for fifty or a hundred people. But that was the seed, and God is giving him the consolation of baptizing the children of those he first baptized. [...]

[...] The mission entrusted to the Church does not lie only in the proclamation of the Gospel but also in learning to believe the Gospel. How many there are who proclaim – at times we proclaim, in moments of temptation – the Gospel, but we do not believe the Gospel, do not let ourselves be laid hold of and transformed by it. This means living and walking in the light of the word of God that we are charged to proclaim. We do well to remember the words of Saint Paul VI: *"The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love"* (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 15). In this way, the Church enters into the dynamic of conversion-proclamation demanded

of each disciple. Purified by the Lord, she becomes a witness by vocation. A Church that goes forth, unafraid to take to the streets and come face to face with the lives of the people entrusted to her care, is a Church able to be open in humility to the Lord. With the Lord, she can experience the wonder, the amazement, of the missionary adventure without the need, conscious or unconscious, to be in first place, to seek or occupy any possible place of preeminence. How much we can learn from you, who are a minority in many of your countries or regions, and sometimes are overlooked or impeded or persecuted minorities, yet have not let yourselves be carried away or corrupted by an inferiority complex or the complaint that you are not given due recognition! Go forwards: proclaim, sow, pray and wait. And you will not lose your joy!

Dear brothers, *"in union with Jesus, we seek what he seeks and we love what he loves"* (Evangelii Gaudium, 267). Let us not be afraid to make his priorities our own. You are well aware that yours is a Church small in numbers and resources, but full of zeal and eager to be a living instrument of the Lord's loving concern for all the people of your towns and cities (cf. Lumen Gentium, 1). [...]

A missionary Church knows that its best message is its readiness to be transformed by the word of life, making service its hallmark. [...] ■



The logo of the XXVIIIth General Chapter

9 - 29 June 2023

CHIANG MAI (Thailand)

Fr. Graziano Sala scj

Each event in the life of the Church is accompanied by an icon, a logo, a picture. The image, indeed, helps to remember the messages, contents and choice of a path.

It is the same for our religious family life.

The General Chapter, the supreme authority of the Congregation, (RL. 180) which meets every six years, needs

a picture, a logo, underlining the theme and translating it into visual elements.

The logo which has been prepared for the next General Chapter contains and translates visually the theme of the General Chapter itself.

I shall try to explain its meaning underneath :

THE HAND



A big hand upholds the logo and its different elements.

It is the hand of Jesus who *'put his finger in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him "Efatta!", that is "be opened"'*. (Mc.7, 33-34).

It is the hand of Jesus realizing marvels, giving sight again, making

able to hear and to speak. These are the three operations the Lord offers us today: once again, he makes us see God at work; once again, he makes us listen to his Word; he urges us to get out of our ways, sometimes ordinary, and to welcome the challenges presented to us by the multiple existential peripheries.

THE SILHOUETTES

The second iconic element, taking life in a dynamic way in the big hand which sustains them, is those four silhouettes indicating over all a movement : they are the four phases of the movement of a person standing up, rising up from the ground. How could we not remember the word of Jesus who, seeing how the sick man is unable to step down into the pool of Siloë, asks him: *"Do you want to be made well" (...) then he said: "Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around"*. (Jn.5,7'9)

Among the frailties which accompany us, seeming sometimes to overcome us and make us fall into a situation of prostration, or even of "sickness", the lack of confidence also seems to creep into



our Congregation. But the voice of Jesus is peremptory : « Rise ! Walk ! » We rise and walk again not because of some form of voluntarism but because we have confidence and rely on the word of Jesus.

These silhouettes have different colours: they show the wealth of diversity, or even better, the conviviality of our differences. Our religious family lives on this wealth. Nations, cultures, multiple traditions,... but in unity.

THE CONGREGATION LOGO

I was saying: nations, cultures, multiple traditions... but in unity. All along a way accomplished together. Together in our family of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram. Religious and lay people. We are not isolated individuals; we are



called to make the community our choice of life. No ministry can allow us to be isolated, solitary. It would mean the death of what we are. For

us, religious, the community is a prophetic announcement of the new times.

It is already a way through which we announce the Gospel. Our Rule of Life (n°95) tells it : *"For his first apostolic community, composed of*

fathers and brothers, Saint Michael Garicoits held to this brotherly communal life "as a means of raising themselves and leading others to perfection."

Let us walk together !

THE FLAG OF THAILAND

At last, the symbolic element wrapping all these elements is the flag of Thailand. It is the country where the General Chapter will take place. The land where, 71 years ago, the Betharramite religious, expelled from China, were welcomed and where the local Church entrusted them with a new mission in the North of the country, in Chiang Mai and the mountain villages.

With veneration and admiration, we remember our brothers who gave their lives to announce the Gospel, fully obeying the Church.

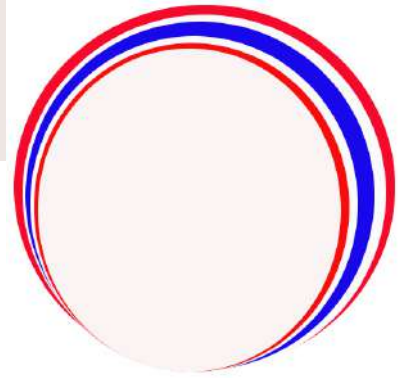
Fr. Denis Buzy, their Superior General, wrote what follows in the NEF in March 1952 :

"More than thirty years ago, when the Holy See deigned to entrust us with evangelising the Yunnan, the Very Reverend Father Paillas asked for volunteers: such a crowd came forward that the Superior General was spoiled for choice. (...).

Today, after personal experience of

life in the Missions, knowing the truth of what that costs in terms of privations, endurance and sacrifice, when these fellow priests could have regained their freedom and returned to normal lives as religious, they turned down the chance as an unwanted gift. They are happier not coming back. They are going to remain. Willing volunteers for a second time. Ready to face all the risks entailed in setting up a new foundation in another Mission.

This demonstration of the missionary spirit is the definitive mark of our Congregation." ■





... the beautiful branch of
Simaluguri
(India)

|
Fr. Sathish Paul Raj scj &
Community

The humble beginning of the Sacred Heart Fathers of Betharram at Simaluguri, a small village in Assam in the northeastern part of India, is truly becoming a beautiful branch of Betharram in India. This gradually growing mission centre experiences constantly the benevolence of the Triune God and continuous support of the Betharramites around the world. Today the mission centre at Simaluguri has become a channel

of God's blessing and a centre for knowledge for many in and around Simaluguri and its surrounding villages.

We are at the service of the people in the fields of pastoral care through Betharram Sacred Heart Parish and in the field of education through Betharram Sacred Heart School.

Pastoral care: Betharram Sacred Heart parish



The pastoral service at Simaluguri is modest but very vibrant and diverse. We are in charge of 7 substations with 300 families and 1400 Catholics, of the Archdiocese



of Guwahati: the Betharram Sacred Heart main parish church at Simaluguri and seven sub-stations, that is Holy Family church at Borpani, St. Mary's church at Dhansila, St. Antony's church at Borbil, St. Paul's church at Chitolmari, St. Joseph's church at Vidyanagar, St. Michael Garicoits church at Baithalangso and St. Miriam church at Tivagon. Our pastoral ministry is diverse and unique thanks to the culture and ethnicity of our Christian community. They consist of different tribal groups of North-East namely Garo, Adivasi, Karbi and Thiva. The Betharramite missionaries are at the service of the people in their spiritual and social growth and empowerment.

According to Late Pope St John Paul II, the parishes are 'the churches that live in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.' In reality we live and experience these words of Pope in our apostolate

here. The guiding principle of our parish ministry is "walking and acting together." We have the village Prachars (catechists) always at our assistance and support. As a result we are able to keep alive the zeal and enthusiasm of the faithful and the vigour and beauty of the Christian community. Like all the Betharramites who served faithfully in the past, those who are serving today remain faithful to the mission they are called to carry out in this place and for this people. Through the grace and blessings of God, we strive to say 'ECCE VENIO' always for the welfare of this place and all these people regardless of their difference in culture and practises. As a result, we have a small, but a lively, active and vibrant Christian community. Following the words of our founder father Michael Garicoits, "Jesus Christ is our mirror...." We reach out to people who are in need of our service



the people, when we began our ministry at Simaluguri. The majority of them are from a farming background and financially poor. Our congregation was able to recognize this need of the

just as Jesus reached out to those around him. We are challenged as well as motivated every moment to get out of our comfort zone to welcome and embrace everyone like Jesus. We wish and pray to be able to continue to be open and to pray with and for the people and be ready to reach out to the peripheries.

Education: Betharram Sacred Heart School

We realized that education was one of the major need of

people and it was natural to try and give an answer. The Betharram Sacred Heart School began in a small bamboo shed with a handful of students. Today it has become a fast growing school in this locality with over 200 students. Our school is a symbol of unity in diversity. We have students of different faith, culture, practices and lifestyle. It consists of Assamese, Boros, Garos, Karbis, Bengalis, Adivasis, Bodos, Muslims, and our catholic students. We also have a responsibility for a small village school, St Mary's school at Dhansila one of our sub-

stations, with over 70 students.

We bring all of them under the umbrella of our school to make them responsible of their future by giving them not just the knowledge from books but also qualitative knowledge obtained through practical experiences outside the class rooms. We also support and encourage our staff to impart value based education to foster solidarity, harmony and love for oneself, for others and for nature. We encourage them to think critically and to be sensitive to other people's feelings through empathy.

Going forward...

The Betharramite mission centre at Simaluguri is the first and

so far the only one founded by and belonging to our congregation in India. So it truly is our pride and our crown for the missionary works of Betharramites in India. At present Fr Sathish Paul Raj SCJ, Fr George Antony SCJ and Fr Akhil Joseph Thykkuttathil SCJ are the members of this mission community. Though it is a humble beginning, yet it is a promising first step for the future of Betharram in India. Our founder's famous motto "*EN AVANT TOUJOURS!*", forge ahead; keep going; come whatever God may will: this is our hope and our trust! ■



The beautiful branch flourishing again in India with the ordination of two brothers, Diac. Joseph Packiaraj Kurush and Diac. Avinash Sagayaraj.

Deacon Joseph Packiaraj Kurush SCJ was ordained a priest on Monday, May 1, in St. Francis Xavier Church in Kusavan Kulam, by Mons. A. Stephen, Bishop of Tuticorin.



Deacon Avinash Sagayaraj SCJ was ordained a priest on Thursday, May 4 in the Cathedral St Xavier of Bangalore, by Mons. Peter Machado, Archbishop of Bangalore.



- The Dicastery for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has granted a **dispensation** for the presbyteral ordination of Deacon Fulgence N'Guetta Oi N'Guetta, so the ordination can be celebrated before the six-month period after the diaconal ordination. Deac. Fulgence scj will therefore be ordained a priest by Bishop Jean-Salomon Lézouthié on July 8 at the Cathedral of Saint André in Yopougon (Ivory Coast).

Meeting of the General Council on May 12, 2023:

- The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, presents to the **diaconate**:

- **Br. John Weerapong Youhae** (Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Region, Vicariate of Thailand);
- **Br. Emmanuel Agninam Assanvo** (Saint Michael Garicoits Region, Vicariate of the Ivory Coast).

The ordinations will be celebrated on 12 August 2023 in Sampran, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Lux Mundi seminar, and on 8 July in Yopougon, respectively.

- The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, **grants one year of exclausturation in the diocese of Parma to Fr. Gianluca Limonta** (Saint Michael Garicoits Region, Vicariate of Italy) from June 1st, 2023.

In the Peace of the Lord

Vicariate of France-Spain | On Friday, May 12, **Fr Jean-Baptiste Olçomendy scj** returned to the Father's House. The funeral will take place on Monday, May 15 at 3:30 pm in Betharram. We will pay tribute to our dear brother of the Maison Neuve Community in the next issue.



Some of our brothers have also lost a loved one in recent weeks. We accompany them with our prayers for their dear departed.

Ivory Coast | On April 17, **Mr. ABA ABA Lechi**, father of Br. Jean-Claude Djiraud SCJ, of the *Saint-Michel* community in Pau (Vicariate of France-Spain), died at Ogedoume.

Paraguay | **Mr. Mariano Torales**, father of Br Victor Torales SCJ (Superior of the community of Puente Remanso) died on April 24th, in La Colmena.

France | **Mrs. Françoise Landel**, sister-in-law of Mgr. Vincent Landel SCJ, Bishop Emeritus of Rabat (Morocco), of the community of Pibrac, died on May 4th.

Argentina | We also regret to announce the death of **Mrs Eva Sandez de Monge**, mother of the late Fr. Fabio Monge scj, a young Betharramite priest who died in 2005. Mrs Eva Sandez passed away on April 25th in Santiago del Estero. She was still very close to our religious Family.



Interregional Novitiate first months

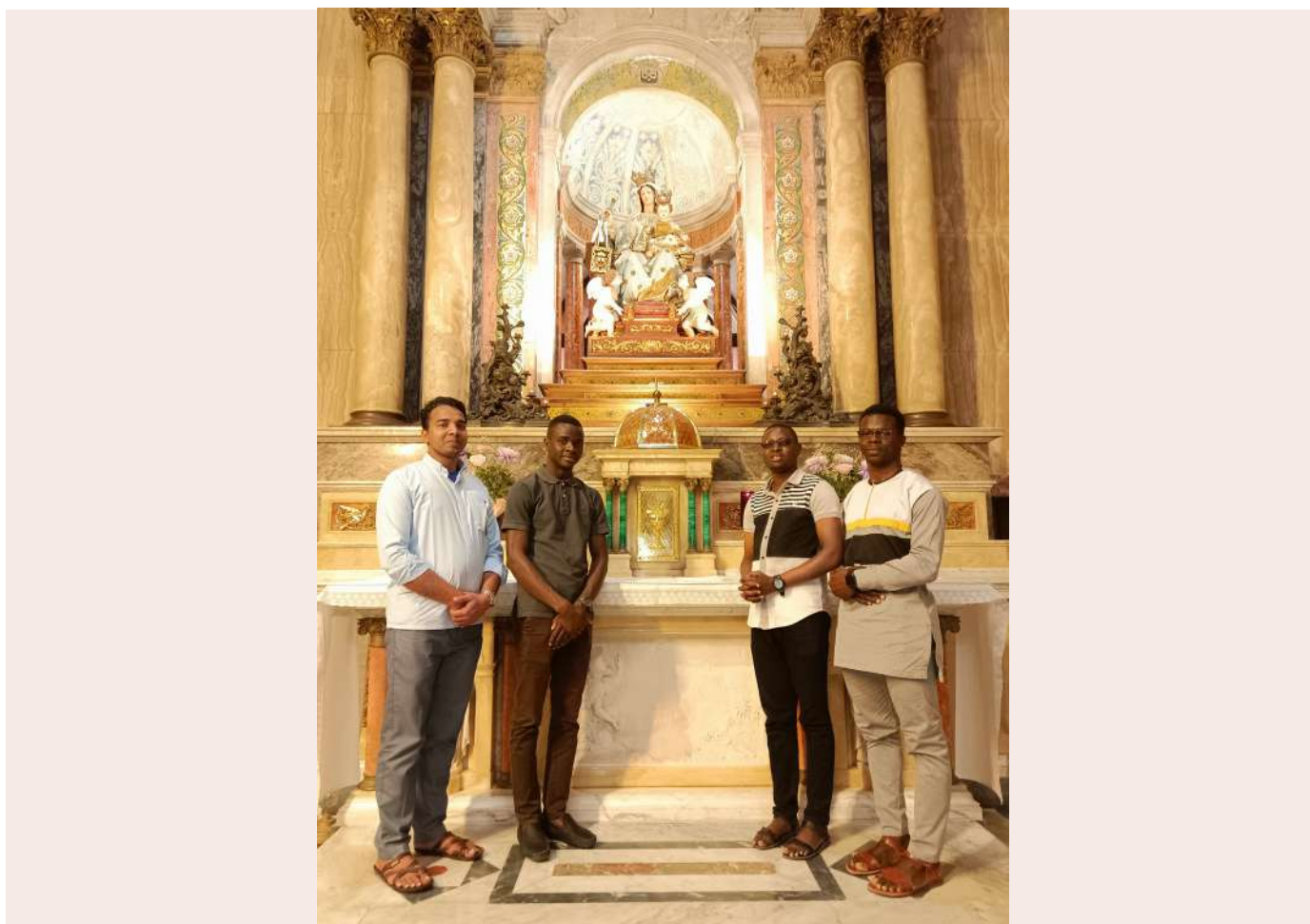
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Fr. Stervin Fernando Selvadass scj
Master of Novices

At the end of 5 months in the Inter Regional Novitiate: "Inter-Regional Novitiate" – "Wow! What an initiative & what a wonderful project! What an enriching experience for the youngsters! What privileged moments for the novices! What lucky novices!" These were the few reactions of few people who heard about the inter-regional novitiate in Bethlehem. Whereas there were few who said, "Inter-Regional Novitiate" – what is it? How does it function? What would be the common language? What would be the multi-cultural-linguistic exchange and experience? Etc...I am sure that as a reader you too must have thought something like this.

St. Joseph Inter-Regional Novitiate is finishing the first part with the first week Ignatian exercises. At the end of 5 months, I would say that it is a meaningful, profound and interior experience. It could be in fact

verified with each novice. "Everything is a blessing and everything is a grace. Even if we have faced the little difficulties like freezing cold, change of food, comprehension of the languages, shock of cultural understanding...Everything is a blessing and everything is a grace". This is what the experience of everyone in the inter-regional novitiate. Yes, we find lot life...lot of exchanges... exchanges very personal and experiential among the novices and the formators about each one's life comprising of human, spiritual, intellectual, social & cultural dimensions of life, life of the region, vicariates, communities and so on. They are directed neither to boast about one's reality nor to accuse the other reality but to go deeper into the essential of life...in religious life. What is insisted is the "profound experience of the Love of God in the school of Christ" (RL. 144) in each one's life. It is because one is made



to realize and to discover that only by knowing God, one comes to know more about oneself. Hence, here comes the importance of self-knowledge.

Novitiate initiates oneself to the self-knowledge, to the religious life, to the experience of love of God. This is what is aimed here in the novitiate. The given conferences are not merely to satisfy the intelligence but to know oneself better and better. Yes, knowing oneself is a pilgrimage too and it could be at times a fearful fact but it is at the same time joy to obtain "freedom which makes oneself detached, open, capable" (RL. 145) of collaborating with one another in order to become a joyful, free,

balanced (RF. 2) and a good religious. After having 5 months of experience, it is so vividly seen not only in their daily reality of community life but also in their tangible experiences in both crèches (Special Home run by the Sisters of Verbe Incarnée and Orphanage run by the Charity Sisters).

As we ever say, "God has created every person unique and filled with potentialities". To actualize this, we need each other. Here comes the importance of team work. I firmly believe that it is not a one-man-show rather it is a work of a team. At this juncture, I am glad to say that we are blessed with two eminent personalities.

Rev. Fr. Gaspar Fernandez – the previous superior general with all his formation experiences, with his convincing conferences, with his exemplary life style, above all his daily God experience - nourishes the novitiate community. The second personality is Rev. Fr. Pietro Felet, Regional Vicar of Holy Land, with his vast knowledge and experience about Holy Land. He creates in us the thirst to have a curiosity which pushes us to see, to touch and to internalize about the holy places. His occasional Eucharistic celebration with a thought provoking reflection based on his experience touches us and moves us to go forward in our spiritual, intellectual and cultural

aspects of Holy Land. Remaining grateful to them, I continue to draw inspiration in my journey with the novices.

What an excellent opportunity to enrich ourselves in BETHLEHEM where the 'WORD BECAME FLESH'- Where the WORD lived, moved, died and resurrected. This WORD was admired by St. Michael, our founder and father. This WORD made St. Michael to say 'ME VOICI' as Christ said 'Here I AM' to his father. I am sure that BETHLEHEM will continue to make us –particularly our youngsters-to confirm themselves in their 'ME VOICI' to Christ and to live it effectively in their life. ■

Saint Michael Garicoïts portrayed by the novices

Br. Aimé: Saint Michael Garicoïts encountered many difficulties in his ardent desire to do the will of God. However, he remained faithful to it and this made him a saint, better still a spiritual master. In spite of the contradictions between the recommendations of Bishop Lacroix and God's plan as received by our holy founder, he practiced the virtue of obedience



to the Bishop. He will say on the eve of his birth in heaven to the parish priest of Igon: "I am happy, I have seen Monseigneur; everything is arranged for better, may the holy will of God be done." For our holy founder indeed, obedience was seen as a mystery, as a concrete manifestation of God's plan for him. In moreover, for Saint Michael, obedience is an immense treasure pleasing to the Father, even if it is so difficult. It

was a bit like dying to himself in order to live united with God and with the brothers. It is to leave aside our will freely to unite that of God: "Here I am without delay, without reserve, without return out of love to do your will. » ■



Br. Aymar:

Saint Michael Garicoïts is a faithful disciple of Christ:

a perfect image of Jesus annihilated and obedient, saying to his Father, "Here am I" to do his will in all things. Like Jesus, he sought in whatever he did was the will of God. Another trait that touches me in the life of Saint Michael is his humility. For him the first duty as a creature, it is to recognize and to confess one's nothingness before his Creator and Lord. He imitated Christ's humility and obedience unto death. With his example, he challenges us to become true disciples of the Lord. ■

Br. Hubert: As I traveled through the life of Saint Michael Garicoïts, I was struck by his natural qualities: The striking characteristic



of his personality was his passionate and persevering will. Other traits of human beings are: his intelligence, his sensitivity, his delicacy and his expanded knowledge. He had a love for his work to be well done. He is also a model of obedience to God and his superiors. He is also, the apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. ■

Br. Joyal:

St. Michel Garicoïts always reproduced the impulses of the sacred



heart of Jesus. He is a good guide who could help us in our earthly journey to heaven. Whenever I think of him, three verses which he lived in his life till the last breath, resounds in me. They are: "Here I am" "More for love than any other motive" "forward, always forward". His heart was always attached to God through the heart of Jesus and through the intercession of Our Mother of Betharram. He lived the Evangelical Vows in its fullness. He too was obedient unto death. He was guiding many souls to the love of God, he continues to guide through his intercessions in heaven. How beautiful are his footsteps. ■



What can Saint Michael say to today's young people?

|

Fr. Simone Panzeri scj

“I take very much interest in your position. I feel how this indecision is painful and even harmful. Yes, dear Friend, I am sorry to see a young man like you torn apart, carried in different directions, and without a definite objective.” (Letter Nr. 164, 15 November 1868)

St Michael still “takes interest” in what young people are living and experiencing in today’s world. The care of young people always was an area of mission in which our Father was greatly interested. As part of this mission, he gave himself over to them through his spiritual direction and their education (when founding the College of Betharram). Far from being something that happened in St Michael’s “past”, his pastoral ministry to the young has been ongoing and is “present” today, here and now. His presence is still felt today in the questions raised by the young who want to hear stories of his spirituality or who feel the impact of his radical motto: “Here I am, solely out of love”.

In the first instance, St Michael

speaks to today’s young people through us religious, through our way of being in touch with their world, through our life in community. Whether you like it or not, young people look at us and, even if we say nothing, they have questions about our existence: “Why do the Betharramites live like this? Who is this Saint Michael they all talk about? What’s so special about their life?”. To be surrounded by young and to have them ask questions of us is in fact a gift we are given. Before becoming the “targets” of our pastoral action, young people are first and foremost “subjects” who are looking to form a relationship with us, with our life, our communities and our spirituality. We need pastoral conversion, since it is not a question of ask-



ing oneself "what can I do for them?" but rather "what are they asking of me?", "what questions are they asking about my life and my witness as a Betharramite?"

Then St Michael speaks to today's young people and they, like young men and women in anytime and place, are living through times of uncertainty at an age when they are called to decide on the direction and meaning their lives should take. Neither destructive nor negative, this uncertainty is in fact constructive, containing as it does the seed of their future, a "germination of the heart" as St Michael would perhaps have put it. Faced with the challenge of seeking one's future, St Michael encounters young people and speaks to them deep within their hearts. Certain aspects of his spirituality they find challenging, striking and yet captivating.

I note that their interest is caught

first by the "Here I am", that availability which is the core of Saint Michael's life. Speaking as it does of readiness and resolution, this "Here I am" resonates with the young who are faced with the uncertainty of their existence. In these times in which we are living, in Europe, all too often the young are drawn to and entrapped by faith groups with strong external symbols; these appear to be affirming and confidence-boosting, but behind a somewhat baleful traditionalism, they mask a vacuum in terms of content and values. St Michael's motto does not sit happily with a faith and a life that is composed of mere appearance and emptiness. On the contrary, it demands that the young work on the depths of their very selves, to go find the fundamental reasons of their existence, to find that which it is truly worth giving one's life to.

To say "Here I am" to a life project

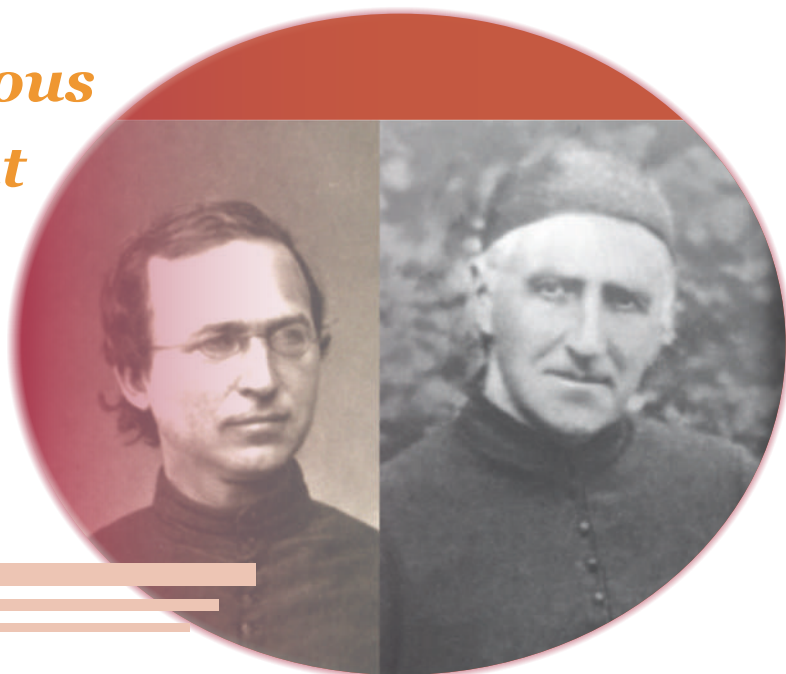
means devoting oneself to it entirely. It means taking the necessary decisions, seriously and responsibly, to undertake a determined course in life; it means being brave, confident and proactive, anticipating one's own future by preparing oneself for and being willing to welcome the joys and the difficulties which are found on every path in life. St Michael speaks to the young by teaching them about this responsibility for life and, in his "method for discerning a vocation", giving them the opportunity to be guided.

Secondly, in listening to young people, I note that another point where they remain particularly attentive to St Michael is what we call the "cult of the present moment". The saying "*carpe diem*" ["grasp the day"], as currently distorted, invites them to grab at whatever it is that "chance sends them", giving over their lives to whatever, more or less happily, they believe is right for them at such a time or on such an occasion. On the other hand, St Michael's spirituality invites them to make a sacred moment of every moment of their lives. Our Father thus teaches the young that life is not governed by chance nor should choices be made based on the superficial criterion "I like it/I like it not", but that life is a sacred space and time, which is constructed continuously, moment by moment. Important choices, major projects, are achieved by devoting oneself to the present moment which, like a brick, must be

placed carefully in the right place, with care, effort and to one's satisfaction, so that a solid compact house is the result. And so every choice represents a step that brings us closer to our life's goal; it fills our whole existence with meaning. In today's world with its "dip in, dip out" lifestyle offering high-intensity but momentary joys that do not last, St Michael proposes that we follow the way that consists of gathering up the little joys that God strews along our path each day, there where each of us lives, studies, works, plays, dances... These joys are modest but they are endless. They belong to the everyday and indeed, they are simple, within the reach of all, but are not humdrum for all that as they nourish us, not just for a single moment, but for all and every one of life's moments. A life is built in each and every instant, in the real choices we make; and at any moment, the fruits thereof can be harvested... until we get to Heaven! In the light of my experience with young people, these are the two areas where St Michael still speaks to them today and encourages them to go "Always Forward", responsibly, hopefully and courageously.

Our Founder thus becomes a point of reference for their growth as well as a travelling companion, enabling the young to avoid the loneliness and abandonment which young people often complain of, as well as offering them the attention which they feel they need. ■

«14. On the precious death of the Servant of God, the procession to the funeral and burial¹



The Servant of God died on 14th May 1863, the day of the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, towards three o'clock in the morning.

In the last days of his life, the Servant of God, exhorting us to the generous practice of our duties, said: "I will have to give an account of your fidelity, and it will be soon". Some have seen in this word a presentiment of his approaching death; I had not been struck by it myself. I believe that, three or four days before his death, he had told me, when entrusting me with the preparation of a retreat for the missionaries that he was forbidden to give: "I do not know what awaits me; whatever the will of the Good Lord is, will happen! »

It must have been, if I am not mistaken, the day before his death; the doctor had allowed Father Garicoits to take a walk. He was carried to Igon and gave the whole community a blessing, which is something he never did. At least that is what I was told and it seems that the Sisters retained a very deep impression from this quick appearance, which was to be his last.

Father Garicoits was struck as if by a thunderbolt; the last fit only lasted about an hour. The evening before, he had a very beau-

tiful word about surrendering to the will of God. He had gone to the kitchen to ask for a broth. As the brother cook (Brother Baptiste) complained of not being able to find anything that would strengthen the patient during the night, without being too much for him, the following dialogue took place between them: “We must comply with the will of God!” said the Father. “With the will of God?!” replied the brother, “yes, by force!” And the Servant of God, who until then had appeared more cheerful than usual, continued, changing his tone and voice: “We comply with the will of God, never by force, but always with respect and love !” [...] ■

May 14
Happy feast of the saint of
Betharram

May 30
Birth of the Ven. Fr. A. Etchecopar

¹⁾ Original title in Latin: “*De prezioso obitu Servi Dei, concursu ad funus et humatione*” • Extract from the testimony of Fr. Auguste Etchecopar at the ordinary trial in Bayonne with a view to the canonisation of the Servant of God, Michael Garicoïts.



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