

*Garicoits scj*

*The Bishop has authorised me to propose to you Father [...] as an assistant. [...] I think that as a helper, he would be useful and would find in your college **the means of continuing to live and die as a holy priest which would be no small matter.***

Saint Michael Garicoits  
(Correspondence, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1861)



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

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

NEF

Betharram

Nr. 197

NOUVELLES EN FAMILLE - 122<sup>th</sup> YEAR, 11<sup>th</sup> series - 14 November 2023

### In this issue

Betharramite priests,  
servants of the  
People of God p. 1

Letter of His Holiness  
on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
p. 5

Being Betharramite  
priest, why or  
what for? p. 7

The shepherd  
according to the  
Heart of Jesus p. 10

Priest - The Com-  
municator for the  
Proclamation of  
the Gospel p. 13

Religious-priest, in  
the footsteps  
of Saint Michael  
Garicoits p. 17

Shepherds for the  
People of God p. 19

Ad multos annos p. 21

Notices from the Gen-  
eral Council p. 26

† Fr. John Britto Irud-  
hayam scj p. 27

Saint Michael Gari-  
coits p. 28

### The word of the superior general

## Betharramite priests, servants of the People of God

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to announce the Good News to the poor,  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and new sight to the blind,  
to give freedom to the oppressed and proclaim a year of favour from the Lord."*

*(Lk 4, 18-19; cf. Is 61, 1-2)*

Dear Betharramites:

On December 20, 2023, we will celebrate the bicentennial of the priestly ordination of Saint Michael Garicoits, hence this November NEF will be especially dedicated to the priestly vocation.

Remembering a priest after 200 years can only be explained by the witness of a holy life like that of our founding father. We stand before a witness, an apostle of the Sacred Heart, venerated not only by Betharram, but by the entire local and universal Church who recognise him as father, pastor and prophet of his time.

Completely dedicated to his vocation and mission, the day after his ordination, he wrote to his parents saying: "From today onwards, consider me dead" ... These words sound harsh, when judged lightly, as if they were not motivated by total love. to Christ and the Church. The radicality of his life will remind us of that to which Christ himself called his disciples, when he invited them to eat his flesh and drink his blood and which, at some point, caused some to abandon him... (cf. Jn 6.66).

The thing is that the priestly vocation, when taken seriously and maturely, represents a definitive, unconditional option, a kind of "madness for Christ" that has no cure. The merciful Father will later grant those who entrust themselves to him many joys in community and with the family, but first we will have to be willing to leave everything for the Kingdom of God (cf. Luke 9:62). It is about a leaving everything "for one hundredfold" that is free, and is not negotiable... (Mt 19.29).

It is the mystery of following Jesus as the "Only One necessary", the One "by whose grace I am what I am" (I Cor 15.10) and for Whom one's own life is offered, as a perennial, cultic offering, which He accepts himself through the Church that declares: "He is worthy" "The Lord has sworn and does not repent: "You are a priest forever according to the rite of Melchizedek"" (Ps 109/110, 4).

There is much to learn from those Betharramites of yesterday and today who, with their lives dedicated to shepherding and serving the People of God – without reservation, without return and out of love – have persevered and reproduced the image of Christ, the eternal Priest, the Servant of the Father.

Saint Michael said: "With a little faith and a little religious spirit, nothing will be missing for everything to be well... Let us put less trust in human means and more faith and religious spirit, as Bourdaloue says somewhere... What do we need on our part to attract God's blessing?: A sincere appreciation of our vocation and our mission; We must have an effective and habitual interior disposition, as authentic auxiliary priests, according to our rules and as true instruments of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, all duties of this beautiful position. With this spirit, all good things will come: the pleasure of our state, fidelity to all the duties of our state, in short, peace and satisfaction in our

## Father John Britto IRUDHAYAM scj

*Srivalliputhur (Tamil Nadu), 26 July 1975  
- Madurai, 28 October 2023 (INDIA)*



Fr. John Britto Irudhayam SCJ died of a serious heart attack in Tamil Nadu aged 48 having suffered some ill health for a while. For 20 years, he served us tirelessly, his devotion was unwavering.

Fr. John Britto joined our Congregation after completing his degree in the year 2001 and made his First Profession in the year of 2003. He did his Theological studies at St. Joseph Seminary, Mangalore. He has also spent a year in preparing for the final vows both in India and Thailand, and made his final commitment on October 31st 2009. Later he was ordained as priest on 16 May 2010.

He served as Assistant Parish priest at St. Thomas Church, HAL, in the Archdiocese of Bangalore in the year 2011-2012 and he did his graduation in B.Ed in Chennai from 2015 to 2017.

Again, he served as Parish Priest of St Peter's Church in the Archdiocese of Chennai in year 2017 to 2020 and as Parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes, Perunkurichi, Diocese of Salem. Then he spent sometime at our Tiptur mission for an experience.

In his lifetime, Fr Brito's devotion knew no bounds, as he left an indelible mark by erecting St. Antony's Grotto and a magnificent chariot in honor of Our Lady in Chennai, and a heartfelt grotto dedicated to Mother Mary in Perunkuruchi, Salem.

Moreover, his commitment extended to preserving the history of St. Michael Garicoits by translating it into the Tamil

language, leaving us with a legacy of faith and service that shall forever inspire and guide us.

Father John Britto dedicated his life to the service of the Lord and His people. He touched countless souls in Chennai, Salem, and beyond, spreading the light of faith. His ministry extended across borders, reaching hearts in Malaysia and Singapore.

Fr John Britto was a living example of faith, love, and compassion. He nourished our spirits with his powerful homilies, leaving us eagerly waiting for the wisdom he shared from the pulpit.

Today, we remember a man who not only served our community but also transformed lives through his spiritual guidance.

As the Congregation, we stand united with the family of Fr John Britto during this solemn moment. We extend our deepest condolences and offer our unwavering solidarity.

May Fr John Britto rest in eternal peace, knowing that he is fondly remembered by all who had the privilege of knowing him.

*From the homily of Fr. Vipin Chirammeel scj,  
Regional Vicar in India, at the funeral of Fr. John Britto*

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

### Meeting of the General Council on November 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>th</sup>, 2023

■ The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, admitted to **perpetual vows** two brothers of the Region Fr Auguste Etchecopar:

**Br Thiago Gordiano Sampaio (Vicariate of Brazil)**,  
final profession on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Br Oscar Mendoza (Vicariate of Paraguay)**, la final  
profession on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023



and the Superior General **presents**  
**to the priestly minister** our two deacons of the Region Saint  
Mary of Jesus Crucified (Vicariate of India):



**Stephen Raghu** (ordination on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024)  
and **Pobitro Minj** (ordination on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024)

■ The Superior General, with his Council, approved the following appointments  
(for a first mandate, from November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, for the Region Saint Michael Garicoits):

- **Fr. Vincent de-Paul Worou: Superior of the community of Pibrac (France-Spain).**
- **Fr. Beniamino Gusmeroli: Superior of the community of Bimbo-Bangui (Central Africa)**
- **Fr. Tiziano Pozzi: Superior of the community of Niem (Central Africa)**
- **Fr. Mambo Elisée: Superior of the community of Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire)**
- **Fr. Armel Daly Vabié: Master of the scholastics in the formation house of Adiapodoumé**

■ **At the request of the General Chapter 2023** (cf. Acts of the General Chapter, point nr. 101/1), the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, established the Regional House and the Houses of Vicariate for the Region of Saint Michael Garicoits on the proposal of the Regional Superior and his Vicars:

- House of Albiate (Italy) as the official house of the Region and of the Vicariate of Italy;
- Mother House of Betharram as the official house of the Vicariate of France-Spain;
- House of Yamoussoukro as the official house of the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire;
- House "Saint-Michel" in Bouar as the official house of the Vicariate of Central Africa.

state" (DS § 338).

Today we know that times have changed, that the world is no longer that of the post-French Revolution and that the Gospel is announced in the midst of the human and spiritual crises of post-secularism, in a change of era; but the vocation, its development and the experience of God, tends to always be the same. The one who responds with right intention to the call by the lake or behind the tax table.

We Betharramite religious, like everyone else, live this experience according to our poor possibilities, our undisguisable weaknesses, but also our gifts. Because we have received the priesthood to announce Jesus Christ, we have "left everything" and "left our land" and we have formed ourselves to "share with everyone the same happiness" that has made us feel that call of Jesus Christ: "Come and follow me." ". A dignity has been conferred on us but not to obtain privileges. Our cradle is humble. "I am neither a prophet nor a son of prophets, but a shepherd and a grower of figs" (Amos 7:14). Let's look at ourselves honestly. Let us recognize that we come from a modest, human and Christian origin and that we can boast of nothing. This is what Saint Michael did when, faced with the poverty of the Daughters of the Cross, he said: "I thought I was a great character...".

We Betharramite priests do not want to reproduce a model focused only on a cult-like theology, but fundamentally pastoral, of service to those who need it, of incarnation where the church sends us and others refuse to go. The Christian experience is born from the proclaiming of faith. But, sometimes, it seems that this fundamental, prophetic dimension is put in the shadows in certain environments, and we are tempted to follow in the footsteps of a clericalism that leads rather to focusing on power, privileges, dignities and a certain paternalism. Our formation must lead to the opposite experience, that of a servant of the People of God, who walks joyfully with him. "Do not neglect the charism that is in you" (1 Tim 4:14; cf. 2 Tim 1:6).

An ecclesial thought to complete our reflection:

"The priest is, above all, a minister of the Word of God; He is the one anointed and sent to announce to all the Gospel of the Kingdom, calling each man to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever deeper knowledge and communion of the mystery of God, revealed and communicated to us in Christ. " (PDV 26).

I would like to conclude by asking you, religious and lay brothers, to

help our Betharramite priests to be faithful to the Grace received, challenging them and inviting them to make grateful memory of the vocation that led them to be what they are: auxiliaries, cooperators, instruments of the Heart of Jesus. "I will give you shepherds according to my heart" (Jer 3:15). Because a priest does not build himself alone, but he is always the fruit of a community (ecclesia) that sustains and configures him as a Servant of Christ.

Always move forward, may God bless you.

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**  
Superior General

#### QUESTIONS TO SHARE IN COMMUNITY:

1. Briefly tell in community the origin of your vocation: your calling, your significant memories, your struggles...
2. Does the People of God on the road today need the service of a Betharramite priest? What should he be like?
3. How do you feel when a brother priest leaves the religious family and goes to the diocese or abandons the ministry? Does it awaken any reflection in you...?

you to continue to be our lighthouse in the middle of this sea.

Their charismatic support allows us to discover and live our Here I am.

**Mónica  
Silvia Gadea**  
(Paraguay)



Dear Saint Michael, 200 years after your ordination, I want to give thanks to God for your life and your vocation, for your dedication and your availability, for your perseverance and your unwavering faith, for all these gifts, which led you to foundation of the Congregation of Priests and Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram, your beloved Mobile Camp, the one you desired, the one you dreamed of from the very Heart of Jesus.

Today, two hundred years later, your marvellous work still stands; your Brothers, your Heirs, continue to mission and work; in a world full of confusion, lost, in need of love; similar to this world in which you lived, and whose characteristics led you to seek a way out, a formula to make it more human, through the love of God, inspired by Ecce Venio and Ecce Ancilla.

Dear Saint Michael, I ask you to

intercede for each of your Brothers, who today have the Responsibility and the Grace to continue your Work, that each decision they take, each step they take, each action that they accomplish, be guided by the same inspiration that you had for its foundation; only thus will it continue to fulfil the Mission for which it was created.

May none of your spiritual sons lose sight of the "Betharramite True North", nor turn away from the path you have traced; because we, their travelling companions, lay people who love Betharram, need everyone: Humans and Saints.

Happy anniversary of Priestly Ordination, dear Saint Michael Garicoits! Thank you for so much Love! ■

communities of Christians, despite the uncertainties and insecurity, come together to joyfully celebrate their faith... the sick who arrive from everywhere... the long lines of children going to school, where there is no government is presence...

I often say to myself: Jesus preferred children, they are innocent!

Here, despite the trials and vicissitudes encountered, I feel fulfilled!

I feel and experience that to give is to receive, and the more we give of ourselves, the more peace and joy we receive from the heart!

I believe in it and I want to see it through to the end! ■



**Vincenzo Elmo**  
(Italy)<sup>1</sup>

I have often wondered to what extent the charisma of the Betharramite fathers was influential in my life as a young lay person.

Being close to the fathers, during these years, allowed me to see Saint Michael's Here I am applied to daily life; observing how they embody in their relationship with God and we lay people the simplicity of availabil-

<sup>1</sup>) Vincenzo Elmo is responsible for the educators and animators of the oratory in the parish of Lissone (Italy).

ity to serve, was a source of inspiration for me.

The particularity of our fathers, of living the Here I am only out of love, allows us, young people, to have at our disposal opportunities to express our talents without reservation, always finding in them without fail a beacon in the darkness of difficulties.

I often took refuge with them in my search for a true examination about life, about my daily life and about the way in which my faith was expressed in Him; their ability to see young people and listen with enthusiasm was a stimulus for me to continue my journey and an inspiration for me to welcome the little ones with the same enthusiasm.

Transmitting to the little ones the joy contained in Here I am is the vocation to which I have responded in recent years. Having fathers as a guide and inspiration allowed me, as I grew up, to appreciate the effort and grace that comes with serving my neighbour with love.

I am convinced that if my life had not intersected with the Eucharistic service of the fathers, I would not succeed in having a light within me which encourages me to always move forward, with enthusiasm and without fear, with the serenity of know that by trusting in God, all difficulties can be overcome.

Young people are hungry for the truth, but they have to face a society that is a sea whipped up into a storm. To the fathers of Betharram: we ask

## •\• A message of the bishop of Rome •/\•

### Letter of His Holiness to the priests of the Diocese of Rome • 5 August 2023



Dear brother priests,

[...]I feel I am journeying with you, and I would like to make you feel that I am close to you in joys and sorrows, in plans and hardships, in bitterness and in pastoral consolations. Above all, I share with you the desire for communion, affective and effective, while I offer my daily prayer that this, our Mother Church of Rome, called to preside in charity, may cultivate the precious gift of communion first and foremost in herself, making it germinate in the various realities and sensibilities of which she is composed. May the Church of Rome be for everyone an example of compassion and hope, with her pastors always, truly always, ready and willing to extend God's forgiveness, as channels of mercy that quench the thirst of today's humanity.

And now, dear brothers, I wonder: in this time of ours, what does the Lord ask of us, where are we led by the Spirit that has anointed us and sent us as apostles of the Gospel? In prayer this comes back to me: that God asks us to go all the way in the fight against spiritual worldliness. [...]

Spiritual worldliness is a "gentle" temptation and for this reason even more insidious. Indeed, it seeps in, well aware of how to hide behind good appearances, even within "religious" motivations. And, even if we recognise

it and banish it from us, sooner or later it presents itself again, disguised in a different fashion. [...]

I would like to dwell on an aspect of this worldliness. When it enters the heart of pastors, it takes on a specific form, that of clericalism. Forgive me for repeating it, but as priests I think you understand me [...] And I, as an elderly man and from the heart, want to tell you that it worries me when we lapse into forms of clericalism; when, perhaps without realising it, we let people see that we are superior, privileged, placed "above" and therefore separated from the rest of God's holy people. As a good priest once wrote to me, "*clericalism is a symptom of a priestly and lay life tempted to live out the role and not the real bond with God and brethren*". In short, it denotes a disease that causes us to lose the memory of the Baptism we have received, leaving in the background our belonging to the same Holy People and leading us to live authority in the various forms of power, without realising the duplicity, without humility but with detached and haughty attitudes.

To free ourselves from this temptation, it is good for us to listen to what the prophet Ezekiel says to the shepherds: "*You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings;*

*but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them" (34:3-4). It speaks of "fat" and "wool", that which nourishes and warms; the risk that the Word places before us is therefore that of nourishing ourselves and our own interests, providing ourselves with a comfortable life. [...]*

Concern, then, focuses on the "I": one's own sustenance, one's own needs, the praise received for oneself instead of for the glory of God. This happens in the life of those who slip into clericalism: they lose the spirit of praise because they have lost the sense of grace, the wonder at the gratuitousness with which God loves them, that trustful simplicity of the heart that makes us reach out our hands towards the Lord, awaiting food from Him at the right time (cf. Ps 104:27), aware that without Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5). Only when we live in this gratuitousness, can we live the ministry and pastoral relations in the spirit of service, in accordance with Jesus' words: "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10:8).

We need to look precisely to Jesus, to the compassion with which He sees our wounded humanity, to the gratuitousness with which He offered His life for us on the cross. Here is the daily antidote to worldliness and to clericalism: to look at the crucified Jesus, to fix our eyes every day on He

who emptied Himself and humbled Himself unto death (cf. Phil 2:7-8). [...]

Clericalism, we know, can affect everyone, even the laity and pastoral workers: indeed, one can assume a "clerical spirit" in carrying out ministries and charisms, living one's own calling in an elitist way, wrapped up in one's own group and erecting walls against the outside, developing possessive bonds with regard to roles in the community, cultivating arrogant and boastful attitudes towards others. And the symptoms are indeed the loss of the spirit of praise and joyful gratuitousness, while the devil creeps in by nurturing complaining, negativity and chronic dissatisfaction with what is wrong, irony becoming cynicism. But, in this way, we let ourselves be absorbed by the climate of criticism and anger that we breathe around us, instead of being those who, with evangelical simplicity and meekness, with kindness and respect, help our brothers and sisters emerge from the quicksand of impatience.

In all this, in our frailties and inadequacies, as well as in today's crisis of faith, let us not be discouraged! [...]

Let us roll up our sleeves and bend our knees (you who can!): let us pray to the Spirit for one another, let us ask him to help us not to fall, in our personal lives as well as in pastoral action, into that religious appearance full of many things but empty of God, so as not to be functionaries of the sacred, but passionate proclaimers of the Gospel, not "clerics of state", but pastors of the people. ■

Guide, the One who asks much of us, who invites us to carry the cross but who then leads us to discover so many wonders accomplished by Him, with the help of so many courageous brothers, in the savannahs of Africa, in the mountains of Thailand, in the hearts of many poor people, thirsty for bread and tenderness. He shapes us little by little, without our realising it, with His Word and the contribution of our brothers in community.

I can say, after so many years of experience, after having gone through half a century of unimaginable changes, that living the priestly ministry in the area of consecrated life, in community, is certainly difficult, but it is also a precious opportunity to educate oneself to listen, to share, and be co-responsible. I would say that it is a privilege, (though we often take it for granted): the privilege of daily encounter with those who live the same mission, those concrete, fragile and strong people, who want to live in fraternity, who want to pray and smile together, even at the age of ninety, who discover every day how much the brothers of our time need to be listened to, welcomed with human sympathy and evangelical understanding, like Him, the Master who lovingly guides our life, did so in his time. ■

**Fr. Arialdo Urbani scj**  
(Vicariate of Central Africa)

To give is to receive! I would like

to say, stretching a point a little, that I was born with a missionary vocation! Already at the age of 11 I was an enthusiast for mission in following the Comboni missionaries. In fact it is really strange how I came to encounter Betharram. Part of my story is about a



melon they gave me to eat, I had never seen one before in the mountains and, as a stubborn mountain dweller, I refused

to eat it.

What did I decide, even though they accepted me as a seminarian? It was to go elsewhere. Were these God's ways?

During the years of training, I discovered that Betharram was not simply missionary. I always insisted to superiors and formators that I wanted to be a missionary and in 1965, after being ordained a priest, I left for Thailand for 12 years... Then, through many adventures and ups and downs (including the doubts of my superiors!), I ended up in Central African Republic in 1986.

Ultimately, why all this?

I was looking for a place to realise my dream: to be at the service of the neglected and needy... and here I found my place as a priest and missionary: the proclamation of the Gospel... the joy of seeing the different

him known and loved through signs of which I have become the servant.

Then secondly that of all the people he placed on my path, in the different places where I was asked to fulfil my mission as a shepherd: young people in schools (Foucauld in Casablanca, Ozanam in Limoges, Notre Dame in Betharram), the MEJ, parishioners of Dabakala, StAndre de Cubzac, Pibrac, Holy Family in Pau, and then the brothers of the Congregation, and now the Sisters of Carmel of Nazareth.

And all these meetings became the place where living stone by living stone, the Kingdom that the Lord entrusted to us, was built,.

And I was but an instrument (somehow). But how happy has been the weaving of this colourful tapestry, meant to portray an image of the Kingdom whose purpose only the Lord, the divine artist, knows.

What a joy to be able to reread and give thanks for each of the people who contributed their note to the harmonious score of the Paschal Alleluia which fills the Church with the richness of its history.

And how happy I am to have been able to share with the young brothers, whom the Lord calls to the same happiness, the things I felt important to me to pass on to them about this wonderful mission. I pray that everyone will discover this joy in the humility of this precious ministry. ■

**Fr. Piero Trameri scj**  
(Vicariate of Italy)



I am now in my 50th year of priestly life. I have been telling people (like a grandad!) that I was fascinated long ago when I was a child.... by the eloquent preaching of my parish priest..... by listening with amazement to the stories of the mission to China of my aunt, a nun.... feeling my heart burn when hearing the stories of the mission of the Fathers of Pime. Then I trusted the One who began to guide my life through His Word, through the Superiors, the community brothers and the people I met.

I walked with Him, sometimes with enthusiasm and sometimes with difficulty or reluctance. I nurtured dreams which were, I felt, systematically denied: from the beginning I would have liked to continue to be able to enjoy the parish ministry, but I ended up studying and teaching at the college - a little like the scenario of Saint Michael who went from Cambo to Betharram. I never had the feeling of being capable of assuming responsibilities as a guide and leader of my brothers. However, I was called to accept the offices of Provincial and Vicar.

But I thus learned to trust the real

•\• Main topics for reflexion •/\•



## Vocation to priesthood



### Being Betharramite priests, why or what for?

| Fr. Albert Sa-at Prathansantiphong scj

St John Mary Vianney once said, "a man is not a priest for himself – he is a priest for others." St Michael in fact lived this saying. So, in order to be a person for others, first of all, we have to accept that we are religious. Religious have accepted Jesus' invitation, "If you want to be my disciple, renounce yourself, take up your daily cross, and follow me" (Lk 9;23).

St. Michael Garicoits became a priest to do the duties of the priest and not to become a founder or a Saint. Of course, he is our founder and Saint. He has become our founder and Saint because of his complete renunciation of self, his readiness to carry his daily cross and his openness to keep on doing God's will, fulfilling his duties. These are the evidences to assure us, "We see him as austere as a hermit, simple as a child, tender as a mother, humble as a useless servant, with

indefatigable activity, with invincible force and gentleness, and at the same time an organizer, professor, chaplain, director of souls, wise in his counsel, intrepid in action, supporting his word by example; we witnessed him, without pause or rest until his last breath, founding, elevating, strengthening the sacred work which has become our inheritance." (Circular letter 1 March 1885)

And another way of being disciple of Jesus according to St. Michael Garicoits is to keep our Lord Jesus Christ as, "our mirror, our example that we must never lose from sight, his life, his actions, his internal and external conduct..., the Saint of Betharram insists. Yes, it is he, only he is my life." (D.S. 341)

In the same way, "Saint Michael Garicoits gave us as a pathway the very programme of the Heart of Jesus:

*"motive of love, humility, gentleness, obedience, and devotion, contained in this first act of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Here I am." (DS 276)*

As Betharramite priests we have not become priest to do the duties of the priest but we are "Betharramite religious priests" that means we too have to do the duties of religious by keeping the three vows;

(1) *Vow of Chastity.* The coming of the kingdom of God brings with it, the gift of consecrated chastity (read Mt 19;3-12). *"The evangelical counsel of chastity embraced for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, is a sign of the world to come, and a source of greater fruitfulness in an undivided heart. It involves the obligation of perfect continence observed in celibacy"* (Can.599). (See RL43)

(2) *Vow of Poverty.* From the life example of our founder, *"I possess nothing... I have only the breviary, the Bible and My theology. I have never been happier than today."* (Corresp.I, 96) As St. Theresa of Avila said *"who possess God wants nothing, God alone suffices."*

*"In imitating his poverty the consecrated person recognizes Christ as Son who receives everything from the Father gives to him everything out of love."* (VC 16) (See RL 51)

(3) *Vow of Obedience.* For us the Betharramite, *"The first meaning of obedience is to listen. For this we*

*need time to silence and space to seek God in our lives, to see all things as 'sacrament of his will' (DS205). (See RL62)*

Therefore, vows are our acts and through vows we are called "Religious". Acts of religious, a beautiful expression of self-gift to God and it's come from God, *"The generous soul, at the invitation and the desire that comes from God, strives towards Him, overcoming any obstacles that separate him, by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, to unite himself more perfectly to Him through love, multiplying and reinforcing the links that already join them."* (DS 278).

The purpose of saying "here I am" for us as Betharramites is to put first in our practical life. After saying "here I am" always has to follow with the action to fulfill the will of God. And it should be the life style of the Betharramite, *"Everything in our conscious conduct must respond to the Holy Spirit and to our superiors: 'Here I am, without hesitation, without reservation, without looking back, out of love for the will of God!"* (DS46)

Betharramite religious and priests must remind ourselves that Jesus calls us to follow him and we, on our part, renounce everything in order to follow him. As St. Mark account to us, *"He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons"* (Mk 3;14f). The one and the only purpose is to follow

the People of God. The fact of being priest does not insulate me from the People, because it brings me close to them, because I myself am «People». I am a priest also because ever-increasingly, I want to be one of the People of God. I believe that this is also one of the fruits of synodality, that each one has his or her place in the Church and in the world. We will only walk together if we know who we are and what place each one of us occupies.

And finally, I seize this opportunity to ask you, my brother Religious and Lay-people of Betharram, to pray for me. And in so praying, help me to give thanks every day for my life as a priest of Betharram with the same passion; and I also beg forgiveness, above all for all the times that I misused my priestly ministry, for the times I got lost, or played about or boasted of my ministry, for the times

I failed to appreciate things at their true value, where I failed to rise to the occasion, evaded a particular duty, or where I used or concealed my priestly ministry for my own private ends. God does not allow himself to be outdone in generosity. He takes care of things. He knows. He loves. I ask Him in these words taken from the prayer of our father St Michael: *«O heart divine, you want to become my heart! It is Your Will. Yes, yes, make way for what is right! Old heart, make way for the Heart of Jesus! Begone forever, old heart! It has been in charge for too long: take its place, O Heart of Jesus, I no longer want to refuse you anything. Cut it out, burn it, suscipe [take it]... Make me love you: that is enough! Amen! Amen!"* (DS § 11)

May God bless you and may Our Lady of Betharram protect you. ■



## Ad multos annos



Fr.  
Jacky  
Moura scj  
(Holy Land)

### 50 years of priesthood...

It is a story of encounters experienced in a particular way at two levels:

Firstly that of the Lord Jesus who came to seek me (why me?) to link my life to his, to entrust me with making





ticularly in the Eucharist and in Baptism. And although when I was young I told myself it wasn't necessary to prepare a homily, now each week I find myself praying it and preparing it... Not for the pleasure of being learned or testing the remnants of theology I learned at university, but because the faithful who come to Mass, pray, bear with me and keep their promise to the Sacred Heart deserve that their priest doesn't just say things off the top of his head, things that are irrelevant, disconnected, anecdotal or trivial. Above all, out of respect for the laity, our laity. The celebration of daily- or Sunday mass with the community leads me to adapt to their pace of life, to notice who's not there and so enquire about news of their health, their family, what may be causing them grief or to be sad and... to give special blessings. Yes. Here I feel I am most myself but at the same time at my most priestly. After Mass, the people queue to request a special personal bless-

ing. Yes, I know, the final blessing has already been given at the end of the Mass. Let me explain. For the people of the Barracas, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Latin America in general, and more particularly those who live in deprived areas, slums or shanty-towns, love a good blessing. It is also another way of coming to see the priest, of saying a few brief words to him. It's also because I want to put myself at the same level as that person, to welcome them, to embrace life and bless the part of God.

My shepherd's heart also loves baptisms. Now that's a veritable celebration of life and of faith! I really enjoy and am uplifted by the baptisms carried out each week after the 10 o'clock Mass. This is not an occasion for me to reproach parents, God-parents and relatives for failing to turn up at church very often, but rather the chance for me to continue to evangelise and proclaim Jesus. Yes, all in the course of one and same celebration! Because I believe that a carefully-prepared, well-celebrated liturgy is also a means of evangelisation.

This is why the words spoken by Mgr Oscar Ojea on the day of my ordination still ring in my ears. A few days before my ordination to the priesthood, he said to me: «Don't forget that you are going to be ordained, but ordained for the people». I didn't immediately grasp what he meant. Today, I do understand, even better than that, I believe it truly and deeply and pray it every day. I am living it, to the extent that I am also living as a member of the People and of

Christ. And this following involves two things and these two aspects of following Jesus are equally important and cannot be separated from one another:

(1) *To be with Jesus.*

Here we have the reflection

reminds us of St. Michael Garicoits: *'Everywhere and always alone with Jesus Christ. The will of Jesus Christ in all I do by the Rule. Jesus Christ in my superiors, whoever they are, Jesus Christ in my brothers, receiving the services I render them, as rendered to Himself.'* (DS § 245/8)

(2) *To be sent out to preach and heal.* This is what St. Michael would say; The Spirit of our vocation and mission is: *"like the spirit of Our Lord, a spirit of gentleness, humility, and devotion, to gently draw sinners to penance and to imitate Him."* (MS203) And The cry of the Incarnate Word: *"Father, Here I am!"* powers our vocation and strengthens our mission to bring the People of God to the Father. How blessed to live as witnesses of Jesus Christ source of our joy, in giving ourselves *"totally to bring to others that the same joy"*. (RL 11) Pope Benedict once spoke about



what people expect of their priests. To paraphrase, he said that people do not expect priests to be experts in anything but the spiritual life.

Being Betharramite religious and priests, we are called to love and to serve God. As we set our hearts on becoming *"Men available, capable, ready to go forward at the first signal of our superior."* (MS 399) This is what St. Michael practiced through his whole life of his priesthood. Let us be proud of being Betharramite priests and sincerely continue to follow the footstep of St. Michael Garicoits in our everyday life. And let us with a proud heart say together:

***'Thank you, Father, for everything we owe you. It was you who initiated us into religious life. It was you who grouped us with your mission from heaven. You were our guide, our light, our perfect model, our strength and our consolation...'***

(Fr. Etchecopar's prayer to saint Michael) ■



## The shepherd according to the Heart of Jesus • the joy of being loved and of loving

| Fr. Alessandro Paniga scj

On 20 December 1823, Michael Garicoïts was ordained a priest in the cathedral of Bayonne and began his ministry as a good pastor, a priest according to the heart of Christ, first in Cambo and then in Betharram. Saint Michael lived what he had written: "To be what we are. To be that without compromise: this is fundamental. Everything is there! The rest is pure vanity. To be a priest: to be a priest of Bétharram. Being in an authentic way! That is everything for me!"<sup>1</sup> He felt himself to be an authentic priest, without compromise, because he understood that God loved him and accompanied him in his priestly ministry. And the discovery of the Heart of Jesus, like the love that saves all men, led him to tell others, through his ministry, of the joy of feeling loved by the Lord and of being able to love Him with all his being.

He wrote in his correspondence that it is necessary, "to live constantly in the joy of the Lord, and to make it burst through into all your behaviour, in all your relationships, with God, with your neighbour and with yourself"<sup>2</sup>; "Never stay withdrawn, sad,

*and melancholic; on the contrary, spread yourself around and act in that spirit which I have so recommended to you, and God will be with you"*.<sup>3</sup> It is not easy to live constantly in joy. What is sometimes also lacking in our communities is the joy of feeling loved by the Lord, the joy of being able to do good, the joy of being in the community that the Lord wanted for us, the joy of always feeling forgiven by the Lord, the joy that comes from bringing joy to others, the joy of being priests and Bétharramites. Pope Francis tells us: 'God is "full of joy" (cf. Lk 15:5). His joy is born of forgiveness, of life risen and renewed, of prodigal children who breathe once more the sweet air of home. The joy of Jesus the Good Shepherd is not a joy for himself alone, but a joy for others and with others, the true joy of love. This is also the joy of the priest. He is changed by the mercy that he freely gives. In prayer he discovers God's consolation and realizes that nothing is more powerful than his love. He thus experiences inner peace, and is happy to be

Igon, 7 August 1845.

3) To a Superior of the Daughters of the Cross, 5 January 1854.

1) Formulated by Fr. Mario Soroldoni scj in Lettere dal Gave, based on the writings of St Michael.

2) To Sister Zéphirin-Saint-Blaise, Daughter of the Cross,



## Shepherds for the People of God

| Fr. Sebastián García scj

Ever since I was very young, I have always wanted to be a priest. The truth is that having known priests from Betharram and having lived with them during my studies at San José College, having experienced their pastoral mission, spiritual retreats, celebrations and indeed just life itself, is what led me to have much affection for them and to want to be like them. After many years and now that I have left my childhood well behind me, I can at last own up to this self-evident truth: I am a priest from and of Betharram, because I also greatly admired the priests with whom I lived.

For sure, once I had entered the Congregation and started to live with some of them «full-time», the feeling of admiration may have waned, ever so slightly, but any illusions I may have had have given way to reality of the option I chose. Be that as it may, the truth is there: something about these priests (some of whom are still alive) touched me. They went on working until they dropped; they never retired; we seldom heard them complain; they were always ready and they were happy to be priests. And I wanted to be like them.

Since November 14th 2009 I have been a priest and I am grateful. I am happy to be a priest! It is the best thing that could ever have happened to me.

This is the way given to me to respond most and best to God's invitation to be holy and happy, in other words, to be totally and fully myself.

In the depths of my being, I always felt I had a calling to be a Pastor. I still remember the words of Fr Jorge Bergoglio to the priests in Buenos Aires: «Be pastors of God's People, not managers!». Being a pastor is something else. It's a matter of walking with the Church, not of giving orders or commands, or of exploiting or directing God's people. As a religious, being a priest is like being a brother or father who listens to and walks alongside another. Hence the fact that no one day is ever like another! And should there be things which trouble me unexpectedly, may I be attentive, may I support, heal, protect, comfort, encourage, give food and drink, be passionate about the lives of others. For me, being a priest is also embracing my own life as well as that of others, as it is, without wishing to change or adapt it. It is also presiding over the sacraments. And that also means becoming part of diocesan life with no fear of thereby being any less a Religious of Betharram or of my Consecrated Life being lost or watered down.

All this I live profoundly in celebrating the faith and the sacraments. Par-

is to pass the baton of the animation of the sanctuaries of Betharram that I loved, to a young brother, convinced that he will bring something more to enrich the transmission of the message of Our Lady and of Saint Michael.

Religious-priest of the Heart of Jesus, I was also ordained deacon in the chapel of Katiola (like Tobia and Beñat before me), responsible above all for the human education of adolescent seminarians. What a joy also to have contributed with my brothers to offering human and professional training to young rural people who suffered from not being recognised in their dignity in this agricultural center of Tshanfeto. But also what joy to have been able to respond to the call of the congregation to offer the Betharramite charism to young Africans so that they become members of the congregation.

I was called in these different places to live the advice of Saint Paul given on the feast of Saint Lawrence: *"If you sow too little, you reap too little; if you sow widely, you reap generously"* (2 Cor 9:6 & 7). What Father Gari-coits tells us: *"the immensity of charity within the limits of its use"*. Serve in the most humble and material tasks to welcome the pilgrims of Santiago de Compostela or those who want to benefit from a time of recuperation at the Notre-Dame reception. Serve while avoiding the temptation to measure one's involvement and seek recognition: *"small, submissive, content and constant"* by doing the will of God.

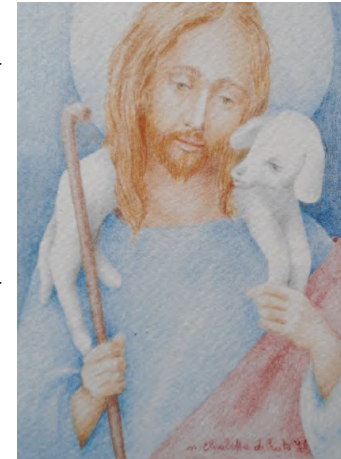
*"What should characterise us is the*



*spirit of obedience"*. Imitating and following 'the obedient Jesus' implies an interior availability to respond to the needs of the congregation expressed by the congregation, even if initially the consciousness of our limitations and our incompetence can make us doubt our ability to fulfill the requested mission. To speak honestly, my experience is that it is not necessary to give full consent at the start. Our Founder speaks of this "spark of love" which is necessary and which will grow over time. And after a few months I discovered the benefits of my obedience without it having given full adherence at the start. The disposition of the heart makes up for our various inadequacies. Moreover, it is a grace to recognise one's inadequacy, it is a necessity to progress and ensure the best possible service. The one who commands can get it wrong; but he who obeys is never mistaken! ■

*a channel of mercy, to bring men and women closer to the Heart of God. Sadness for him is not the norm, but only a step along the way; harshness is foreign to him, because he is a shepherd after the meek Heart of God".<sup>4</sup>*

To tell us about the heart of God and to tell us how precious each of his children is, Jesus turns to the image of the sheep that goes astray. He recounts a parable not to clarify what must be done by the one who has strayed from the Lord, but to introduce his hearers and us to the heart of God, to make us understand what the Father of heaven experiences when one of his sons goes astray. He recounts it to emphasize what God is willing to do to bring home a sinner and the joy he feels when he can again embrace him. Then comes the celebration. The description of the party is not very realistic, it is excessive. The pastor runs from house to house, calls his friends and neighbours and organizes a party whose story occupies more than half of the parable. It is the image of the infinite joy that the heart of God experiences when it manages to recover a son. This must also be our joy when we succeed in



bringing a soul back into the arms of God. God has a shepherd's heart, a heart capable only of loving and doing good. He is a shepherd who gives himself for his sheep. He does not rebuke, he does not punish those who are wrong, he does not condemn those who have fallen into the abyss of sin. Do not

add any other evil to that which man has already done in moving away from God. This is also our mission as pastors, as priests. A witness tells us, speaking of Saint Michael, *"When he was speaking of God, his heart ignited, his face illuminated. With his gestures and words, he inspired in everyone the feelings that overflowed from his heart."* And he himself said: *"How good God is!"* yes may your heart beat a field, completely penetrated with this sentiment and a taste for God's goodness; may this feeling follow you always and extend to all your actions, so that they will season if I can speak in that way, all your conversation; and let all those who go out from you carry with them this sentiment of God's bounty."<sup>5</sup> To know that there is someone who cares about me, who has contemplated me with love since *"I was be-*

<sup>4</sup>) Homily of 3 June 2016 for the Jubilee of Priests

<sup>5</sup>) Letter to a lay person, 15 January 1833.

ing formed in secret, textured in the depths of the earth.” (Ps 130, 14-15), who now tenderly accompanies each of my steps and waits for me, whether I have been good or bad, with his fatherly arms wide open. It is a decisive thought to give meaning and fill every moment of my life with joy. It is a sublime mission to proclaim to the world the good news that, from all eternity, every man is in the heart of God. This means having the heart of the good shepherd. Having a common Father in heaven who loves us and whom we can meet is a joy that must be communicated to our brothers and sisters, “to give others the same happiness in imitation of Mary Most Holy,” as our Founder said.

We can be good pastors according to the heart of Jesus, including when we are in community, when we are able to live our relationship with our brothers and sisters generously and provide others with the joy that we will also have for ourselves. Saint Michael said, “If we want others to be happy with us, let’s start by ensuring that they are happy.” He goes on to say, “Let’s try to be charity itself towards other debtors.” The joy we feel in ourselves is born of the joy we have given. An English proverb says: «Joy is born a twin», that is, true joy must be shared with others. Saint John XXIII, in his daily guiding principles, wrote, among other things: “Only for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy, not only in the other world but also in this

one.... Only for today, I will have no fears. In particular, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe in goodness.”

I live in our home<sup>6</sup> for the elderly, which I am now too. Often, the joy of living does not shine through in our faces and words. Our priestly service certainly consists in providing others with a little joy, a joy that always depends on the certainty that the Lord comes close to us, to support us always, especially in the darkest and most difficult times and also depends on us knowing and feeling that we are one another’s brothers and sisters.

A missionary in the Amazon said: “One Sunday, after talking about prayer and trust in God in a leper colony, an old, leper-blind woman approached me and said, ‘Father, I pray all day, I pray for the pope, for the bishops, for the priests and for all men. I pray for the peace and joy of all.’ The missionary then asked her, ‘What do you ask of God for you?’ She replied, ‘Nothing! I am happy this way, I am happy with the happiness of others!’” And let us share amongst ourselves this wish that I like to make at the end of Holy Mass: “May the joy of the Lord be our strength. Let us go in peace.” Today more than ever we need the joy and strength of the Lord to live in peace. ■

<sup>6</sup>) Community of Albavilla, Italy

God and the unfathomable source of our spirituality. Let us gently remind ourselves that it is not a mechanical transmission of the Word, but a communication of the experience of

the Incarnate Word saying ‘Yes’ to the Father which has to transform every aspect of our mission. Always ahead. ■



**Religious-priest, in the footsteps of Saint Michael Garicoïts • to identify with the heart of Jesus “humbled and obedient”.**

**| Fr. Laurent Bacho sej**

In Betharram, at the chapel of the saint, my gaze remains attached to two phrases shaped in wrought-iron (in the chapel gallery) “the gentleness of the lamb” and “the humility of the doves”. They remind me how necessary these two qualities are, to be a religious priest of Betharram. Our Founder, who had suffered the rigidity and severity of Jansenism in his pathway towards first communion, took his ‘revenge’ by allowing himself to be fascinated by the love of God. I have always been amazed by this declaration on Christian tenderness included in Rule of Life §10: “What should constitute the main character of our spiritual life? Christian tenderness.” For me it is a joy to refer to Rule of Life §9: “reveal to the men (and women) of our time, tenderness and mercy, the loving face of our God-Father”. I am particularly sensitive to this astonishing advice from the Founder: “to attract sinners, gently, to penance and its humiliation.” During

the year of mercy, I was happy to have been made a “missionary of mercy”, very attentive to this recommendation made by a nun who gave me the tools of this ministry in Rome and who joined in the repeated orientation by Pope Francis to priests: “not to be a customs officer of grace but a facilitator”. I needed this healing ointment to calm the demands I placed on those around me which needed to be a little more infused with kindness.

Gentleness but also humility, without which life in community becomes a burden. The community is the privileged place to embody my being as a religious priest. The congregation allowed me to experience the richness of interculturality in a situation where I was a foreigner myself, then by welcoming brothers from other vicariates and living with them; an interculturality which welcomes with joy and which gives without proposing oneself as the model to imitate. And today, my joy

intellectual rhetoric or theological pedantry may not be a rewarding and useful technique for communicating the Word. What the listeners hunger for is not only to follow Jesus but to understand and encounter Jesus every day. So the priest should be able to break the Daily Manna in a way people can understand with the right use of social media and communication tools which have become an indispensable part of the daily life of the people.

#### **v) Correspondence between the Word and Personal Life**

St. Michael wishes that the primacy of the witness of life makes the Betharramite's preaching convincing. His deep faith coupled with a genuine love for the word and its embodiment in his personal life should become the inner dynamism and compelling force in proclamation. How encouraging when St. Michael exhorted, "*Christ is our mirror from whom we should never lose sight.*" This calls us to have the mind of Christ in all that we say and do. Hence, the lack of dichotomy between what is preached and what is practised by the priest in his personal life will not only make his ministry credible but most importantly generate faith and conviction in his hearers. St. Michael reminds us that to make this proclamation of the Gospel understandable, the priests must not only preach the Gospel but also translate the Word into

their lives which would intrigue the lives of the people of God to come closer to God.

#### **vi) Conversion as the aim of preaching**

A careful reading of the correspondences of St. Michael tells us that every word that we communicate should have a spiritual force and dynamism to strike people's conscience and demand a conversion of heart. Thus the priest's message should prod hearers to reshape their vision and reorient their life to centre on Gospel values. Only stimulating preaching can deepen the faith of the hearers and impact transformation in them. To facilitate this, we have the rich Betharram spiritual writings. Added to that the Church recommends the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the lives of saints as indispensable points of reference (cf. *Instruction on the Study of the Church Fathers in the Formation of Priests*, 26-27). Pope Francis acclaims, "*The Word of God is for everyone, the Word calls everyone to conversion, and the Word makes us heralds.*"

To sum up, the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the ordination of St. Michael invites the Betharramites to do the ministry of the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel with renewed vigour drawing inspiration from the ever-living Word of



## **Priest – The Communicator for the Proclamation of the Gospel**

**| Fr. Michael Bistis Fernando scj**

This appellation describes best the mission and passion of all the Betharramites as we commemorate the 200th anniversary of the ordination of the holy priest of God, St. Michael Garicoits our Father on 20th December. What would St. Michael envision for his sons the religious of the Sacred Heart who share in the ministerial priesthood of Christ today? To have deep-rooted intimacy in the Word of God. From the Word of God flows our passion for God and his people and enables us to become the communicators for the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel today.

#### **St. Michael – the communicator for the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel**

The fundamental duty of every priest is to be the communicator for the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel. This proclamation would be characterized by interiority and spontaneity without any external compulsions or force. The life history of St. Michael depicts us that he lived this conviction starting from the day of his ordination on the 20th December 1823, by Bishop d'As-tros in the Cathedral of Bayonne.

His proclamation of the Gospel was to transmit the interior love of the Master to all whom he encountered from his initial years of priesthood. With unwavering vigour, he continued the same proclamation of love when he was appointed as curate at Cambo. He transformed the parish in a few months with his outstanding devotion to the Heart of Christ and continued to nurture his deep-rooted love for the Word of God till the end of his life.

#### **Word of God transforms the lives of the priests**

The life of St. Michael became a passionate communication of God's message. He wishes his sons, the auxiliaries of the Sacred Heart to be formed by the Incarnate Word. The Word of God is to be our sustenance and source of energy. St. Michael's prayer life teaches us that if a priest wants to live his life with a passion for God, then he must centre his life on the Word of God. It then becomes the source of the priest's spiritual life, nourishment for prayer, light to see God's will in the events of life, and strength to live out his mission faithfully. Thus the primary requirement for the Betharramites

to proclaim the Gospel effectively is that they be men of God, living in close intimacy with the Word of God through prayer.

### **To be the 'pastor' is to be the 'prophetic proclaimer'**

In the Scriptural language, to be a 'pastor' necessarily implies performing the task of teaching or instructing (Jn 10:4,16, 27). He is authorized officially to break the Word.

That is why he is considered to be the minister of the Word. The proclamation of the Gospel is his sacred duty. He is commissioned in a special way to proclaim the Word to all as it is affirmed by the II Vatican Council (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 9; *Lumen Gentium* 28; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 4). Teaching and preaching the Word forms an integral part of the priest's life. St. Paul would warn, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). And this inseparable duty the priest performs by the authority in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*) and in the name of the Church (*in nomine ecclesiae*).

### **Priest of the Sacred Heart - communicator for the prophetic procla-**



### **mation of the Gospel**

For the 21st-century Betharramites, St. Michael from heaven would intercede to have the following characteristics to be the communicator for the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel.

#### **i) Personal Familiarity with the Word**

The effective proclamation of the Word of God consists in the priest's familiarity with the Word. His familiarity with the Word needs to be augmented by sufficient knowledge and ongoing updating on the magisterial teachings, particularly on the interpretation of the Word. Let us remember the warning of St. Jerome – "Ignorance of the Scriptures is the ignorance of Christ." The priest must believe that the lifelong journey in the Word of God would strengthen his holistic formation. To this end, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (26) recalls: "The priest must be first the 'believer' of the Word, with full consciousness that the words of his ministry are not 'his' but of Him who has sent him." He is called to nourish himself every day with the Sacred Scriptures and to communicate them with wis-

dom and generosity to the faithful entrusted to his care. For this to happen, the priest must himself be a 'hearer of the Word' after the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

#### **ii) Personalization of the Word**

Acquirement and deepening of the knowledge of the Word demands a personal dedication and personalization of the Word. To make others convinced of what he preaches, first, he should be convinced of what he preaches. This calls for serious preparation through personal prayer and reflection, and assimilation through study and reference to suitable books. (cf. *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priest*, 94). He needs to invest ample time and make an effort to prepare properly to break the Word. These indispensable exercises will facilitate making the Word of God a profoundly personal word. Drawing inspiration from the Holy Spirit in personal prayer and deep meditation on the Word is an inalienable requirement for the personalization of the Word. The priest needs to learn to rely on the inspiration of God rather than human wisdom. For the Betharramites the best example would be to draw inspiration from St. Michael. He nourished himself every day with the Incarnate Word saying 'Ecce venio' which was the source of his daily motivation.

#### **iii) Correct and Authentic Interpretation of the Word**

When the priest interprets the Word of God it is to be free from theological errors and be deeply rooted in the unbroken traditions of the Church. Any attempt to compromise the Christian doctrine to suit the fashions and fads of the time will amount to diluting or circumventing the truth of faith. The priest should not forget his duty to protect the sheep from the onslaught of false prophets and bogus teachers, who lure them to go astray. In order not to divert the focus of the proclamation, it is better to remind ourselves of the exhortation of the bishop on the day of our diaconate ordination. The words spoken by the bishop to the one ordained as deacon are both a comfort and a challenge: "Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practise what you teach." The Word that we believe, teach and practice is His who has sent us to proclaim in line with His mind and they are to be interpreted in His light and truth.

#### **iv) Use of effective methods for communicating the Word**

The priest needs to be a creative communicator. What is required is to devise and employ appropriate methods by which the Word can be explained in intelligible ways to people of all social backgrounds. A noble and dignified use of modern communication skills will not only enhance his preaching but also reap a rich harvest. At times, resorting to