

# NEF

# Betharram

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## A word of the superior general

## Pilgrims in hope and authentic witnesses to the charism

*"Children are a gift from the Lord, a blessing, the fruit of the womb;  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of your youth."  
(Ps 127. 3-4)*

Dear Betharramites,

In this message, continuing the path outlined by the General Chapter of Chiang Mai 2023, I propose to you, religious and lay, to reflect together on the Betharramite charism. I confess that I don't really like to talk about our charism without serious study, not because I don't like to do it, but because I don't consider myself a specialist. What I can share with you is my experience of having visited all the Betharram communities in the world and having recognized, on that pilgrimage, so many happy and exemplary Betharramites. They are our "hidden" witnesses who, from their position, without asking for change or recognition, are faithful and creative in

the mission entrusted to them, and carry out their tasks with an unlimited love, way beyond their own human efforts, always relying in divine help.

We Betharramites join a pilgrimage in hope, with our strengths (in difficult times...), and our many weaknesses, so often hidden by the love of the faithful who walk by our side. We are called to be pilgrims by our basic identity.

When we are faithful, we manifest and reproduce a generous impulse that becomes visible to others, which translates into the giving of life. The Betharramite does not aim to please himself, but instead seeks to lose himself in Christ, to humble himself so that later he can be exalted. He knows that he who humbles himself will be exalted (Lk 14.11) and accepts it.

The lay person or the religious who lives this dimension also spreads joy, whereas the one who does not, causes confusion because he proclaims a "Here I am" but does not translate it into his lifestyle. That is why there are Betharramite virtues that leave us exposed when they are proclaimed and not lived. *Obedience out of love*, for example, authentic availability desired by Saint Michael, is what gives life to the congregation. It is verified when we accept the entrusted mission with joy, and discern, together with the superiors or elected leaders, the project for each one of us and for our communities around the world. Betharramite obedience does collide with the current overvaluation of individual freedom and personal autonomy, in the name of which we do not like to be challenged... Everything proper and personal is often absolutised, or is presented, under the appearance of good, as something that must be respected. This attitude puts us at centre stage and in practice diverts us from the goal for which we were summoned in Betharram: to seek the same happiness for others. When this happens, and there is no act of generous dedication, or losing oneself to find oneself, it isn't apparent that we are Betharramites, even if we feel as much, or dress up our behaviour with pious expressions.

Today other obstacles have surfaced, such as: indifference, pastoral individualism, coldness in the face of the challenges of mission, abandonment of what is difficult and peripheral, unseemly power disputes between brothers, ideological dissensions and sterile discussions, etc.

They could gradually undermine and kill the dream of Saint Michael Garicoits, and risk plunging our religious family into a kind of "collage" made up of brothers who live without a defining charism. Are we perhaps intended to head to a weak identity, or even an aimless worldliness, which is not only far from our charism, but far from the gospel too?

Since we have decided to be Betharramites and the Church considers us legitimate bearers of that call, we have committed ourselves before God to our religious family for life. The initial formation of a Betharramite lasts more than ten years, and involves a great effort of supportive accompaniment: human, spiritual, pastoral, economic, etc. But permanent formation lasts a lifetime. It is about internalising the feelings of the Heart of Jesus, that is, learning to manifest and reproduce those values with our entire lives. There are numerous brothers who, inspired by the *Ecce Venio*, have embodied it in their religious or lay being, as the fruit of an experience of faith that has transfigured their lives. The most genuine part of the charism lies within them and the result is a sign of New Life that beautifies the Church.

Thus, being Betharramites, pilgrims "in" hope, means that this virtue, although *it does not yet fully belong to us*, nevertheless *inhabits us, drives us from within...* In effect, marching as a community in mission generates a renewed hope, when it is centred on Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, who died and rose, and who today continues to say to his Father, *Here I am to do your will*, and always goes forward, like a hero, marking the path...

We know that the Jesus of Saint Michael is very dynamic, he moves, walks, jumps, runs. (He is a pilgrim!)

*If only our entire being, body and soul, had a single movement, a generous impulse to surrender to the direction of the Spirit of love, repeating incessantly: Here I am! Ecce venio! (Thoughts 124-125)*

He is alive and resurrected:

*Jesus Christ is present everywhere, asking for and receiving our services and dealing with us in all our affairs.*

*Who will not be able to admire this ease that Jesus Christ has given us to find him everywhere, to constantly act with him and*

*face to face with him?*

*Always and everywhere alone with Jesus Christ. The will of Jesus Christ in everything I do according to the rule.*

*Jesus Christ in my superiors, whatever they are.*

*Jesus Christ in my brothers, receiving all the services that I do for them, as if he were doing them himself.*

*How easy it has been for me to live in intimacy with him! That honour! What happiness! What security! (DS 248-249)*

We are *Betharramites, pilgrims in hope*. The virtue of *hope* has to do with *joy*, which becomes contagious if it is founded on the One who has loved us so much and who also *awaits us*. Yes, He, the Son of God made man, the Servant of the Father, is always eagerly waiting for us because: *"he has greatly desired and continues to desire that we love him."*

We know that each of us, as *Betharramites*, are called to choose "the better part", the one that "no one is going to take away" and therefore, to do so we must, in the midst of ordinary actions, be able to contemplate and adore the person of Jesus, in every encounter experienced, inside or outside the community.

The adoration of Jesus recognised as present in the brother is thus translated into an attitude of humble and constant service towards everyone, done with joy, ready to do, like Mary, "everything that God asked of her."

*A Holy Easter to everyone!*

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**

Superior General

*Questions for sharing:*

- 1) Does the Church need a charism like ours today? Why?*
- 2) What face of Christ should we Betharramites propose to the People of God on their journey?*
- 3) Does your community-in-mission share the Betharramite charism with the laity? In what way?*

## From the Homily on Holy Thursday 2023

St Peter' Basilica, 6 April 2023



[...] To create harmony is what the Spirit desires, above all through those upon whom he has poured out his anointing. Brothers, building harmony among ourselves is not simply a good way of improving the functioning of ecclesial structures, it is not the minuet dance, or a matter of strategy or politeness: it is an intrinsic demand of the life of the Spirit. We sin against the Spirit who is communion whenever we become, even unintentionally, instruments of division. For example, I would mention again the topic of gossip. When we become instruments of division we sin against the Spirit. And whenever we play the game of the enemy, who never comes out into the open, who loves gossip and insinuation, foments parties and cliques, fuels nostalgia for times past, distrust, pessimism and fear. Let us take care, please, not to defile the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the robe of Holy Mother Church with disunity, polarization or lack of charity and communion. Let us remember that the Spirit, as "the We of God", prefers the "shape" of community: willingness with regard to one's own needs, obedience with regard to one's own tastes, humility with regard to one's own claims.

Harmony is not one virtue among others; it is something more. As Saint Gregory the Great writes: *"the worth of the virtue of concord is shown by the fact that without it, the other virtues have no value whatsoever"*.<sup>1</sup> Let us help one another, brothers, to preserve harmony – this is the task – starting not from others but each of us from himself. Let us ask ourselves: In my words, in my comments, in what I say and write, is there the seal of the Spirit or that of the world? [...] ■

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1) *Homilies on Ezekiel, I, VIII, 8.*





## Identity and charism

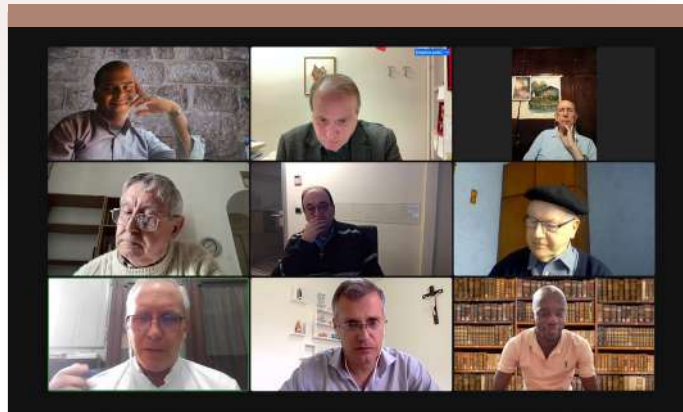
### A VIRTUAL ROUND TABLE TO EXPLAIN THE BETHARRAMITE CHARISM TODAY

The NEF seeks to tell the story of life in the Congregation, but it also intends to tell, using new expressions, the charism for our age.

This is, moreover, what Jesus teaches us in his Incarnation: *"No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is God, who is in the bosom of the Father, it is he who has made him known"* (Jn 1:18). **Jesus tells of God so that He is "understandable" and "near".**

Likewise, we wish to transmit the charism that Saint Michael gave us by using languages understandable to our contemporaries. It is not a question of saying something else, but of choosing new words.

This is why, in the wake of what emerged from the General Chapter which took place in Chiang Mai, last



Friday March 8, a group of religious met by videoconference to talk about how to say today the key words of our charism.

Many life stories emerged which, more than theories on charism, described the reason why these religious gave their lives completely to the Lord through the charismatic gaze of Saint Michael Garicoïts, whom we will celebrate next month.

May reading these insights inspire new expressions to tell the story of charism today.

I won't add anything else, except that it was a great experience.

Fr. Graziano Sala scj



**The charism of Betharram is par excellence a charism of openness: from the movement of the incarnation to the wound of Calvary. It begins with a strong response: 'Here I am, out of love.' This promptness in the gift of self, reminds us that life is here in the real world. (Acts of the General Chapter § 4)**



## A beautiful adventure

| Fr. Laurent Bacho scj

This roundtable was a good initiative that allowed for a synodal approach among Betharramite religious from the 4 continents<sup>1</sup>. The topic of sharing "identity and charism" echoed the reflections of the group of the general chapter that shared on this theme (motions 1 to 30), which I took part in. The identity of our religious consecration is illustrated by these "*stakes that need to be reinforced*" (Is 54, 1-2), as clearly indicated in the motions of the chapter (1-8). The absences of religious recorded in the past 12 years have worried us and require us to make an effort to live a greater fidelity to our religious profession, without just complaining.

The founding Charism has been given to us by past generations; each of us individually and together must value it today; it will be received by the new generation who will find, in the daily life of the religious and their mission, an important treasure to

1) Around the Superior General: Fr. Graziano Sala, Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue, Fr. Stervin Selvadass, Fr. Laurent Bacho, Fr. Armel Daly, Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez, Fr. Juan Pablo García Martínez, Fr. Tobia Sosio.

claim ownership of. During our chapter in Thailand, we witnessed this inspiring reference to the missionaries that gives enthusiasm to our brothers. For my part, I am convinced that our charism is remarkably relevant. Even though it may seem less attractive in our Western world, it continues to be a real attraction throughout the world; amazed by the evangelical face of Saint Michael Garicoïts, young people dare to knock on the door of our congregation which does not have flamboyant works. Often I have witnessed that our founding text finds a strong echo in them. With the text, they also discover faces that call to them to take the path of the Betharramite consecrated life.

In this world searching for material well-being, committing to "*follow the broken and obedient Christ*" as we express on the day of profession (RdV 153) is a challenge to face against the general mood in all countries. And yet, as religious, we discover that it is a path that leads to true happiness. This commitment allows us to "*annihilate our ego...*

for the growth of our filial and fraternal being" (motion 17). Of course, this requires the support and help of brothers to encourage and welcome, but also the support of the laypeople we accompany and who can accompany us (RdV 3).

In this world where inequalities, poverty, suffering, and insufficiencies are glaring, "imitating and showing the desire of the heart of Jesus" is exhilarating. We are propelled, beyond all our individual needs, to become witnesses of this heart of Jesus that loved the world so much and to accompany our brothers and sisters weakened and wounded by life. A condition to achieve this service: a back and forth between action and contemplation with a communal sharing in truth and depth (motions 9-14).

In our Church sometimes accused and disdained, our charism invites us to humility and gentleness (Mt 11, 29). For me, No. 9 of the Rule of Life is extraordinary; of course, very demanding but mobilising all the energy of an

apostolic heart "to reveal to the people of our time the tenderness and mercy, the loving face of God the Father". This missionary project towards others also becomes for me

a springboard when I am in crisis or am failing, or am subject to ingratitude and humiliation within the community or outside. The heart of Jesus can allow me to "accept frustrations and humiliations" (Motion 17). This is the remedy of which the Word of God spoke to us recently on the 4th Sunday of Lent (Jn 3, 14-21). This heart of Jesus that attracts us "from the impulse of

the Incarnation to the wound of Calvary" (motion 4).

After these beautiful words, it is enough for me to live this charism which continues to draw me by awakening in me every day the gift received (motion 6) and by experiencing great joy in passing it on. Beautiful adventure! ■

**In this world where inequalities, poverty, suffering, and insufficiencies are glaring, "imitating and showing the desire of the heart of Jesus" is exhilarating.**





## The charism of Betharram: a gift of the Holy Spirit

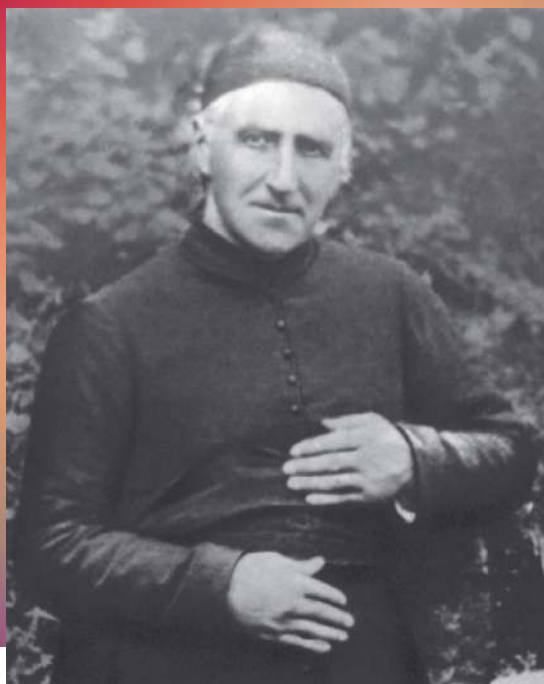
| Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

The charism of Betharram is a gift that the Holy Spirit has granted to Our Father Saint Michael Garicoits to know, love, imitate, and reproduce the Love of God manifested in the self-emptying obedience of the Heart of Jesus, the incarnate Word. This gift consists of a theological experience that Saint Michael lived for several years through external events and interior experiences.

External events: the solitude of Betharram, seeing the bishops cry, knowing the Daughters of the Cross of Igon... Interior experiences: prayer with the texts of the New Testament: Jn 1.14; Heb. 10.1-10; Phil 2.5-8; Mt 11.26 and other passages..., the reading of Bossuet and Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori.

The synthesis of this theological experience is made known to us in what we call The Founder's Manifesto, which although written in the third person, is autobiographical: he speaks of the Priests of Betharram implying that he himself has lived that theological experience as "a prodigious spectacle."

*"a) In this experience he allowed himself to be deeply impressed by the discovery of the face*



*of the God of Love, and by the offering of Jesus to the Father for the salvation of humanity, at the moment of His Incarnation, saying: "Ecce venio"; this discovery becomes for St Michael the element which unifies his whole life; the conformity to "Jesus humbled and obedient" (Manifesto) by love, in the style of life that St. Michael wished for himself and for his companions. [...]"*  
*(Formation Guide § 36).*

Our Formation Guide cites the above, quoting the 1993 General Chapter and continues this quote in



[...] that the God of the little people and the poor had chosen him for this purpose, he, the shepherd of the last house in the hamlet of Ibarre, he, a nobody, a write-off, and that God said to him: "Go found a new Institute in my Church; it has a reason for its existence in these troubled times, where the great Orders are dispersed and where the

No. 37: "The goal of Betharramite formation consists of living the same experience: 'To live in depth the experience of the charism as it was lived by our father Saint Michael'. The gift that God gave to Saint Michael is also granted to those who are admitted to join the Congregation and to lay people (Rule of Life 3), who have to live that experience. It is not a different experience from that which is typical of the novitiate, in which the young person in formation knows Jesus internally in order to love him more and follow him better (Formation Guide 63), and chooses to be his missionary disciple. Furthermore, this experience must be taken care of throughout life.

Father Etchecopar gives a precious testimony of this theological experience of St Michael and his people: 'Father Garicoits believed...

spirit of revolutionary independence penetrates everywhere even onto the Sanctuary ... Here is your flag and your rallying cry ... You will march ahead, with the banner of the Sacred Heart, uttering the cry, the Ecce Venio of my Son, and you will be his joy and the support of his Church".

He believed that voice; he seized that banner, and, in his powerful voice declared: "It is an illness of our age, to substitute our will for that of God and to say to him: Go away ...for I want to be god myself! So I summon together the volunteer army of perfect obedience and good Divine pleasure !! "11 And he launched himself on this road of destiny like a giant and walked there until the end of his life. '(Circular letter, Betharram, 10/January/1888)

I have heard holy Betharramite

say that when God grants someone a grace like this, he also asks them to witness it with his life. They also said that Saint Michael died on "the cross of obedience." God tested Saint Michael Garicoits in his life with obedience to the bishop of Bayonne, who understood the Congregation differently than him, which created division, leading many to abandon it. By obedience and trust in the Sacred Heart, true Founder of the Congregation, the Church confirmed him in 1876, thirteen years after his death, in the grace that the Lord had granted him.

This spiritual experience is what gives us identity and unifies our life, "I have been created for this lifestyle." It also gives us belonging to the Congregation: I vibrate with what happens in the Congregation, with its joys and its sorrows, which are mine, I rejoice with the achievements of the brothers and I suffer with their problems. I am not ashamed of the problems of the Congregation, I suffer them because I make them mine.

This spiritual experience makes us understand *Ecce venio* as the personal offering of our life for love of the Father, together with that of Jesus, from conception to death, to

collaborate in the salvation of men.

This spiritual experience makes us free and available, like Jesus, for the needs of the Congregation, instead of being attached to our personal activities: a Mobile Camp.

This spiritual experience commits us to understanding the mission that has been entrusted to us not as personal property, but as a way of "achieving a similar joy for others," united with Jesus.

This spiritual experience requires us to live "for love more than for any other reason" as Jesus did and asked of us.

Theological experience makes us "fit to work for the purpose of the Institute" (suitable), like Jesus and Saint Michael Garicoits.

This spiritual experience leads us to let go of the ties that prevent our availability and freedom to take an active part in the life and mission that the Church has entrusted to the Congregation (*expeditos*).

This spiritual experience makes us abandon our interests and put ourselves at the disposal of the Holy Spirit ("internal law of love") and superiors ("external law of obedience") so that the Congregation can carry out the missionary commitments that it

**This spiritual experience is what gives us identity and unifies our life, "I have been created for this lifestyle."**

discerns.

Without this spiritual experience, what do all these expressions really mean in our lives: *Mobile Camp; Here I am; Jesus humbled and*

*obedient; More for love..., sans delay, sans reserve, sans retour; small, submissive, constant and happy...? ■*



## Our charism for today's world

| Fr. Tobia Sosio scj

It is quite obvious that yesterday's language is not readily understood in today's world, in particular by the younger generations. It took a great deal of effort, including for Jesus, to make the language of the New Alliance understood by those who were still stuck in the cultural rut of the Law. And yet, it is but a single commandment, which goes beyond the boundaries of time: You will love God with all your being, and your neighbour like yourself. Here the New leads the Old to its logical conclusion. In every time, the prophets called into question a love of God (the Temple) which neglected love of neighbour (the widow, those in prison...).

While accepting the Founder's Manifesto as a permanent element in how we imagine our Charism, we can perhaps accentuate some aspects

thereof which are timeless and can thus remain incentives for our current times.

If we were previously attracted by the "flying camp" *Ecce Venio*, ready to head off at the first signal, maybe today we should give priority to the *Ecce Venio* which "puts itself in the place of all victims"; an *Ecce Venio* that is a "model which shows us the rules of love"; an *Ecce Venio* which takes on mortal flesh





in response to the mankind of today, so often a slave to and possessed by numerous demons.

In so doing, we are not changing the charism, on the contrary, we are thereby bringing it to complete fulfilment. There can be no "Here I am" without obedience, even less of a "Here I am" without the poor and less still of a "Here I am" without a love that is transparent, total and generous.

More than being mere devotees of the Sacred Heart, St Michael suggests that we imitate his virtues: *"This is how God loves us: this is how Jesus Christ our Lord and creator became an indescribable attraction for our hearts, a perfect model and an all-powerful help."* (Founder's Manifesto). We are often tempted to be individualists, in order to get around problems or fruitless discussions by resigning ourselves to being a few (and old at that!) religious... until such time as a voice, reaching us from the other side of the world, shakes us up and shows us the Church Outgoing is the one-and-only irreplaceable Church of Jesus Christ. Betharram also wants to *"go out, without delaying, to encounter Life"* (General Chapter, 2017).

Pilgrims of hope and pilgrims in hope, we want to rise up and walk, *"enlarge the tent and strengthen the guy ropes"* (Chapter General, 2023).

The language of the Love of God and Neighbour goes beyond the boundaries of time and retains its attractiveness for the young and the not-so-young alike, who embrace the Cross of Him who "so loved us" (see the logo for the

Year of Jubilee 2025), regardless of their culture or their geographical origin. We can incorporate this language into our apostolic community projects, where these reflect a clear missionary profile in response to situations of poverty, marginality or periphery which are present in one way or another in the environments where our communities are active.

The younger religious are without doubt more inclined to want to «go out» and it is most encouraging to see the older ones supporting them with advice, encouragement, with their own experiences and, above all, with their prayers...! On their return, they ask the younger ones: how did it go? your apostolate? your mission? It is the occasion for a lovely community reunion, in which you feel part of a family and are at home; and that is how we journey together.

The Year of Jubilee 2025 is intended to bring hope and also a response, based on faith and love, to the difficult times which humanity is now facing: wars, migrations, care for the environment... Betharram is certainly called upon to make its modest contribution.

I am very happy to note that we are a Congregation defined by interculturality, and with a high proportion of young people.

I feel closer to the Sacred Heart when I express the Betharram charism as follows: Here I am, in Love and for Love.







## The community: the “mobile camp” so dear to our Founder

| Fr. Armel Daly Vabié scj

Oh what a beautiful scene! The Son of God gazes on his Father, in one long “Here I am” out of love for us, taking to extremes the attitude of the perfect servant: *He humbled himself, making himself obedient until ‘to death, and death on the cross’.*

This magnificent act, carried out for the salvation of men, seduced the heart of Saint Michael Garicoïts and impelled him to found, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “a society of priests whose entire programme was the very programme of the Heart of Jesus (...), ready to run, at the first signal from their leaders, wherever they are called: even and especially to the most difficult ministries and to those which others would not want!” From birth, this elite group of soldiers was schooled in charity, humility, gentleness, obedience and dedication as experienced by Jesus Christ.

In the above, we can glimpse the Betharramite style in which we have all been formed. And this Betharramite

**The community is for every Betharramite religious a mirror which can show him if he is still on the right track...**

identity must be lived daily in community and deployed in a generous and ever creative way in our various missions.

The community is for every Betharramite religious a mirror which can show him if he is still on the right track or if he is moving away from it...

e.g. Does it move me now to meet my brother and travel with him? Do I have difficulty seeing him and welcoming him as a gift from God? Do I refuse to see in my brother the wonders that God works in him despite his weaknesses...? If



so I must tell myself that I am fighting the wrong battle because I am killing fraternal life in community which is an essential element of consecrated life.

As for our mission places, they can be the beautiful scenes where we discover the reality of the "Here I am" of our Lord Jesus Christ which so seduced Saint Michael. The Betharramite who, subtly, without notifying his superiors, creates his own fringe activities (which cause him to neglect his community) where

he sends himself and persists in not reporting or listening to reason, may be a great "builder or tireless activist". But he deals a mortal blow to the "mobile camp" so dear to our Founder.

To conclude, I will say that in any walk or life, there are ups and downs; but let the downs never take over. Let us continually open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit so that our Church and our world may enjoy the presence of our Congregation. ■



## Building the community

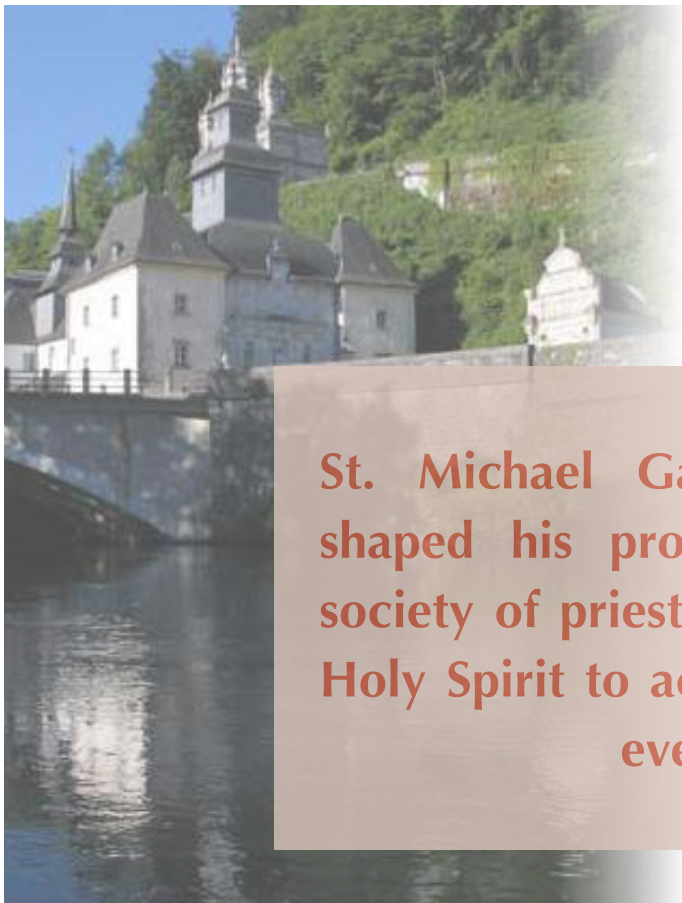
| Fr. Jean-Do Delgue scj

Today, building a communal life, day by day, remains a challenge! To speak of «community» implies mutual acceptance, reciprocal listening, walking together with our differences, faithful attention to one another, openness to another culture, a constant focus away from yourself and a forgetting of self. Choosing to live in community in a world where personal fulfilment takes precedence above all else is a constant struggle to overcome selfishness and the temptation to manage your life without reference to anyone else, to live independently, sometimes deaf to the calls of your brothers in the community

or superiors. Communal life demands a constant openness to brothers often with a different upbringing, a unique history, not forgetting a significantly different character...!

Today, the religious of Betharram can only radiate the charism of St. Michael Garicoits within a community where availability, humility, dedication, and detachment are essential attitudes for "*imitating Jesus annihilated and obedient*" (Manifesto).

St. Michael Garicoits certainly shaped his project to found a society of priests



**St. Michael Garicoïts certainly shaped his project to found a society of priests by allowing the Holy Spirit to act in the midst of events.**

by allowing the Holy Spirit to act in the midst of events. He took the time to begin his work, waiting for the arrival of the first companions who gradually joined: Fathers Guimon, Chirou, Larrouy, Fondeville, Perguilhem - priests who were different, both strong and fragile, missionaries at heart. Together, in October 1835, they committed to a life of chastity, obedience, and poverty. From the beginning of the foundation, it is the "we" that matters, to live the "Here I am, through love." It is the "we" of the community that becomes the key for each one to adjust their role, "to dedicate themselves entirely to procuring the same happiness for others" (ibid). It is the "we" or the plural of the community that matters to St. Michael. It is astonishing to find it in prayers he composed and which are dear to us.

*"Why is our Society called the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Because it is specially united to this divine heart saying to our Father: Here I am! in order to be his co-workers for the salvation of souls."*

Just as in this beautiful prayer for unity: "My God, do not look at my sins, but at the Society that your Sacred Heart has conceived and formed. Deign to give it your peace,

*this peace according to your will, which alone can pacify and unite closely with each other all those who compose it, with their superiors, and with your divine Heart, so as to be one, as you and your Father and the Holy Spirit are one. Amen! Let it be so! Let it be so!"*

What a call for each of the religious of Bétharram so that in the heart of religious communities in the various vicariates, following St. Michael and his first companions, they commit to be capable, free, and totally available to follow Christ and serve Him for the salvation of the world.

Today, the "we" of the community must mobilize the religious with the community and the community with the religious to "be, in the world, through our entire religious life, a sign and proclamation of Jesus Christ." (RL.13) ■



## Expulsion of the Congregation from France (part 2/2)

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

### 2. How the expulsion took place

**The expulsion in France is one of the most important moments in the history of the congregation. It enabled the Betharramites to « get out » of the Bayonne diocese and open themselves to the world ; However, this opening did not happen without pain.**

At the beginning of the XIXth century, the Congregation was made of two main cells. In the Bayonne diocese, besides the mother-house which included the monastery, the *Maison-Neuve* (a house of missionaries), the religious were in charge of the schools of Orthez, Oloron and Bayonne, of the sanctuary of Sarrance, the Saint-Louis de Gonzague church in Pau, and the chaplaincy of the Servants in Anglet. It is in South America that the Congregation had its most prestigious works : in Buenos Aires, the San José school, the San Juan school and the formation house of Almagro ; in Rosario, the Sagrado Corazon school ; and in Montevideo, the school of the Immaculate Conception. At last, there was Bethlehem, the residence of the

chaplain of the Carmel, and the see of the great Seminary.

The expulsion caused the end, though temporary, of the Congregation presence in the Bayonne diocese, and the closing of all its communities in France.

On July 1st 1901, the French Parliament adopted the law on Associations<sup>1</sup>, ruling, between others, the relationships between the State and the religious Congregations. According to this law, the General Council, led by the Superior, Fr. Victor Bourdenne, had to prepare a request of a special permit for the Congregation<sup>2</sup>, which was brought in the Paris Chamber on September

1) See the previous issue of the NEF.

2) Law of July 1<sup>st</sup> 1901 relative to the Association Contract.

*Article 8 : the religious Congregations existing when the present law is promulgated, which would not have been authorized or recognized before, will have, in a three months' delay, to justify that they have made the necessary proceedings to conform themselves to its prescriptions.*

*Without this justification, they are considered dissolved without further consideration. It will be the same for the Congregation, to which this right has been refused.*

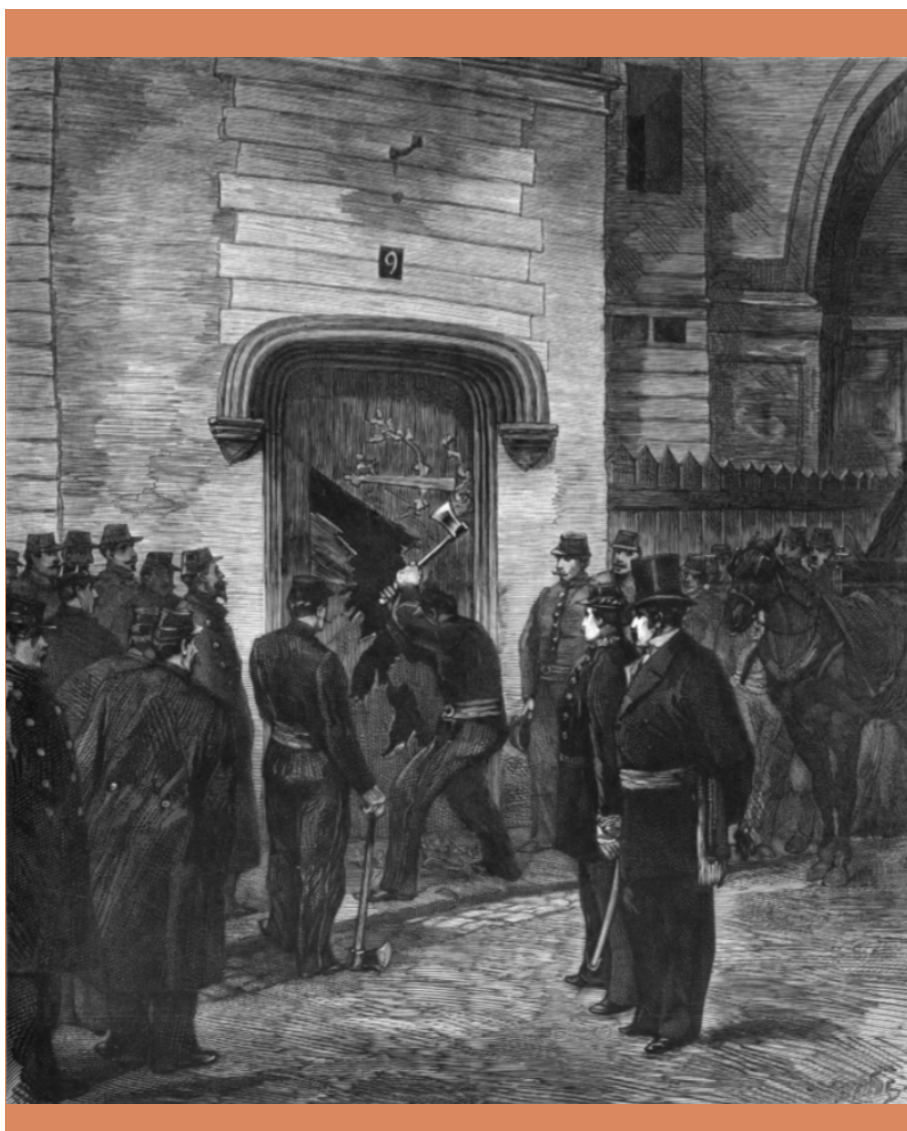


18th of the same year.

Foreseeing the worst, on the next October 30th, Fr. Bourdenne wrote a circular letter to all the religious of the Congregation, proposing them three solutions : 1) to stay on the French territory, but living alone and submitting themselves to a *modus vivendi* compatible with the obligations of religious life ; 2) to expatriate themselves in a country near France, in Spain or Belgium, where negotiations were already in progress to open temporary refuge places ; 3) or to leave for South America where, in addition to the schools already established, at the same time, the opening of two new schools was planned in La Plata and Asuncion. Concluding his letter, Fr. Bourdenne asked all the religious to send him their decision.

On March 18th 1903, the French Parliament refused the authorization for Betharram. On April 3rd, the Police Constable notified Fr. Bourdenne that according to the law, it could not exist anymore, and that the properties were sequestrated. In fact, on April 6th, a certain Mr. Château,

the agent of the liquidator in charge of the Betharramite properties, presented himself in Betharram to put the seals on the real-estate of the mother-house. However, to guarantee the good order of the school-year, the four schools directed by the Congregation obtained a three months' respite before closing. The other houses did not obtain any delay : the Betharramites had to leave Pau, Anglet and Sarrance between 14th and 16th May 1903.



*Firefighters breaking through the door of the Dominican convent. Drawing published in the newspaper "L'Illustration".*



If the bureaucratic machinery of the State followed its course quite rapidly, so did the Congregation. They had to pack up and leave. The religious had already been informed of their future destination: on May 13th, the novices left for Bethleem ; between May and June, several groups went to Irun in Spain; Lesves, in Belgium, saw a flow of religious during all the month of May; the departure for America only took place at the end of the school year. Many stayed in the Bayonne diocese, "dispersed", as the authorities wanted, since the law had abolished community life.

At last, on the last week of July 1903, the schools of Orthez, Bayonne and Oloron were closed. Only the mother-house and the school of Betharram were left. The latter was closed after the last solemn prize-giving on August 1<sup>st</sup>. On the same day, Fr. Bourdenne left for Irun, where the General Chapter was to open a few days later.

In the Betharram mother-house, in spite of the warnings of the Prefecture and the expulsion order, they chose a passive resistance. Fr. Paillas and Fr. Tucou were staying there, with some elderly and handicapped religious who refused to evacuate the buildings and to give the keys to the liquidator. On August 5th, legal action was taken against them, but it was a waste

of effort. To execute the law, only the resort to strength was left. The Police Force of Coarraze, Nay and Soumoulou was mobilized. When arriving in Betharram, they found it encircled by thousands of people, of persons flocking up spontaneously to defend the monastery and the sanctuary. Reinforcements had to be asked for. The Mounted Police Corps arrived and was welcomed by whistles and protesting hooting. The Police charged the crowd which reacted violently. Some people were hurt and arrested. However, the Police succeeded in reaching the monastery doors, and among the turmoil and scuffle, they proceeded to the expulsion.

At 7.40 p.m., the Police Constable could send a telegram, from Lestelle, to the Prefect of Pau, announcing the final expulsion of the religious with satisfaction : *'Building evacuated at 7 p.m. without too much difficulty, but thanks to the Mounted Police which could contain crowd evaluated to thousand people shouting : "Hurrah for liberty ! Hurrah for the Fathers !"*. *Sick people sheltered by families. In spite of pouring rain, 200 people still persisting staying in front of the building'*.

They had to wait for seven years before being able to enter Betharram again. ■

## *Pilgriming in the countryside of Ibarre*



“This heart calling from within, from whom we came and to whom we should thanks for everything is the foundation on which we must build without ceasing and be raised ever higher.” RL. § 3

Fr. Etchecopar, Letter to Fr. Magendie, Bethlehem, 12 December 1892



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