

Let us answer this cry of
the Sacred Heart with a cry
of love: my goal is to unite
myself with God, to put my
hope in the Lord my God.

(Saint Michael Garicoïts DS § 13)

Happy New Year 2024!



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Betharramites, pilgrims in hope

*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where will come my help?
My help will come from the Lord who made heaven and earth"*
(Psalm 121)

Dear Betharramites:

The Church is marching towards the year of Jubilee 2025. We join it with the motto: **"Betharramites, pilgrims in hope."** We too want to join this walk, together with the People of God, who raise their heads, even though they pass through an often gloomy and challenging present. We are sons and daughters of a suffering humanity who do not give up seeking the True Light, and who still dream of living in Justice and enjoying lasting Peace.

Pilgrims in hope, we Betharramites renounce being prophets of bitterness and calamities. Saint Michael Garicoïts taught us a different truth: *"We should never expect more than when everything seems lost."* And he used to say: Our hope is in eternal Life. *"For me, my goal is to unite myself with God, to put my hope in the Lord my God."* (Ps 72.28)

Thus, as simple pilgrims, we follow Jesus Christ *on the road*. Our entire Christian life can be defined as a long trek where the grace of the Holy Spirit is made known in a living way. We don't just raise a banner, a badge or a slogan, but we are transformed from within, along the way...

In general, people define themselves by a "what", by *what they are*, but as pilgrims we could define ourselves rather as people *who have a "for"* in life. (Who we are for or what we are for.) We live *for someone, for something*. That is, we define ourselves by our relationships, whether with each other, with the world, but especially: with God. This mode of being (for) is what permanently puts us in relationship with each other, thanks to Jesus Christ who came to save us. We are pilgrims who never walk alone, but in community.

Pilgrimage means, moreover: decentering ourselves, letting go of ego, and putting ourselves on the road. For this we must be open to a Spirit that drives us and always invites us to live in the openness of the quest.

We all have some experience as pilgrims. In Argentina, every year a youth pilgrimage is organised to Lujan, a small City of the Virgin Mary, patron saint of the Nation. Hundreds of thousands of young people walk (on the first Saturday in October) for 60 km - throughout the afternoon and night - to arrive at dawn at the Marian Sanctuary, and offer themselves at the feet of Mary. Some do it with great faith, others because of a promise made to the Virgin, others perhaps just for keeping fit, and some even just out of curiosity. But what I do believe is that everyone does it *with the hope of arriving*. It is a hope that requires effort, because the road is long and there are obstacles such as the cold, increasing fatigue and, above all, blisters... Along the way, near the basilica, there are many aid stations where hundreds of young volunteers serve the pilgrims: a hot soup, a cup of water or a hot maté (tea-like infusion, typical of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and southern Brazil). This way they are helped to regain strength to ARRIVE (that's the important thing: to ARRIVE!). There is also assistance from some paramedics and doctors, located in tents along the side of the road, ready to serve those who need it. Already in the church, the priests celebrate mass every hour and also the sacrament of reconciliation for pilgrims. They usually hear confessions throughout the night. I remember that this was a must-do appointment for Bishop

the 1841 Constitutions; that anything which had been attempted or carried out contrary to these Constitutions was but the effect of a saintly illusion; that a Bishop may not establish a religious Order, the Pope alone has that right; that he may and desires only to grant optional vows; that we are not Jesuits but his diocesan missionaries."

"A saintly illusion". It was these three words, terrible for those who heard them, by which the Bishop summarised the whole of Fr Garicoits' work: St Michael had been labouring under a misconceived illusion: the Betharramites were and would remain diocesan missionaries. Moreover, the prelate reinstated the 1841 Constitutions to the Institute, thereby doing away with all the concessions he had allowed over the years out of regard for Fr Garicoits. On this topic, Fr Duvignau wrote: *"These might have been suitable for a group of missionaries but not in any way for a religious community. No vows, no*

stability, because the Bishop could at any time dispose of its members and even remove them from the Institute; he oversaw all the appointments; he oversaw all the accounts... Such a Society would forever be deprived of any life of its own."

The strength of St Michael and, at the same time, his greatest hope, lay in his certainty that God was on his side: *"The Congregation is the work of God; He founded it; He will preserve it and help it move forward in His service and His love."*

It would take years and the indefatigable work of Fr Etchecopar to convince the Bishop and gain permission to appeal to Rome to see the Congregation approved as an Institute of Pontifical Right. On 30 July 1875, the Holy See published the *Decretum laudis* which recognised the new Religious Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Reason was given at last to the one who had laboured under an illusion. ■



•\• A page of betharramite history •/\•



A saintly illusion

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

St Michael passed away at dawn on Ascension Day, May 14, 1863. He died without seeing the completion of his life's work, the foundation of a religious institution recognised by the Holy See. The Congregation of Betharram was nothing but a simple association of diocesan missionaries, devoted to the apostleship of missionary work in parishes and teaching in schools. Vows were made on a voluntary basis only; perpetual vows did not exist. This state of affairs reflected the ideas of the then Bishop of Bayonne, His Excellency Mgr François Lacroix, who had other similar institutions in his diocese, such as the Missionaries of Hasparren, who ministered in the diocese's Basque region in particular. However, the Founder's intention had always been clear, even if the saint himself had been aware of the difficulties he might encounter.

Fr Etchecopar wrote: *"Father Garicoits one day admitted 'The tears I see falling from the Bishops' eyes are what inspire my project of creating our Institute, but what a long painful birth process it is!' The obstacles were humanly insurmountable; I look upon the existence of this Society as a great miracle. It could be nothing else;*

so high-minded was the Founder's purpose! The more heroic a work, the more it is fought for..."

Fr Garicoits' funeral rites were held on Saturday May 16, 1863, in the presence of several hundred people. The Bishop, who wept openly before the deceased's coffin, presided the ceremony and, as recounted by Fr Duvignau, *"gave a funeral oration which amounted to early canonisation."*

In the afternoon, Mgr Lacroix assembled the community and gave a short address in which he appeared, in both word and deed, to contradict everything he had said earlier that morning. Having reaffirmed his thinking, that was to say, that the Betharram Institute was and would remain simply a cluster of diocesan priests, he added a sentence which (one can well imagine) caused huge upset and not a little bitterness in many of those present.

Fr Etchecopar has left us the minutes of this meeting; he wrote: *"As for the Constitutions which ought to govern our Society, My Lord Bishop declared in the most express terms that his firm and unwavering intention had always been and always would be that we should confine ourselves to*

Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who spent long hours there every year hearing pilgrims' confessions.

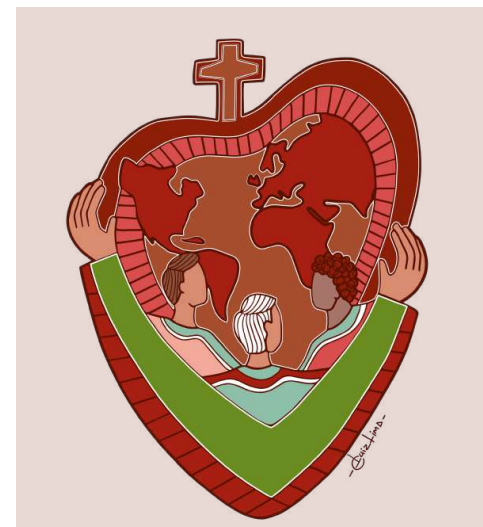
Perhaps this simple example helps us to understand why the Pope speaks of the Church as a *field hospital, of pilgrimage alongside the People of God, of welcoming migrants, of listening, accompanying and forgiving (as God always does with us)...*

a way to celebrate faith with simplicity and to mission with prophetic boldness, etc. The Pope himself was and still is a fellow pilgrim.

I invite you to prepare well at the beginning of this year so that we too can reach the feet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, even if we do so barefoot, sore and with hands empty of merit, it comforts us to know that we are **on a pilgrimage in hope**, full of hope, despite everything...

We Betharramites know that the path of life is a growing search for dependence and security only in God, which is the fruit of hope (this *theological virtue*). Poor in means, happy and generous in heart.... that is how Saint Michael Garicoits wanted us to be. "The road" and "The pilgrimage" go hand in hand. It will be necessary to make this theological virtue grow in us to achieve the goal. That is the interior pilgrimage to which we are called. Hence the importance of the thirst for God, in order to forge a pathway of holiness. In fact, desire comes together with the grace that *moves and grows*. *We have to want to go on a pilgrimage, we have to want to reach the designated goal*. If there is *desire*, there can be movement, even if there are wounds, fatigue and heaviness.

Our Betharramite pilgrimage also implies **freedom**, it is about arriving



•\• Notices from the general council •/\•

to meet “Someone.” To do this, we must encourage an active inner disposition that will inspire our lives, inviting us to take risks, to make choices, to give up what is easy and comfortable to obtain what is *precious*. It is about choosing freely but, above all, **choosing the right path**.

We must be *oriented*, have references. Our guide is the Heart of Jesus, which was given to us as a *road map* and guide throughout life, like a SatNav of Love.

Thus, walking along the road, we access a totally new source of strength, where the **poverty** assumed by the pilgrim himself plays an important role; since being *poor* we can adapt more easily to the vicissitudes that arise along the way. While as *rich* people, we tend to seek earthly security, and trust more in the means than in the Guide and Teacher..

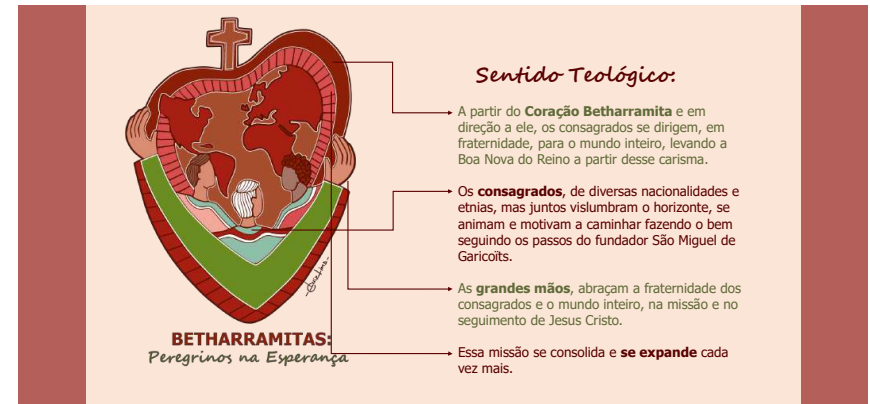
We Betharramites know that the Pilgrim Jesus is not someone who induces us to walk from afar, but someone who became *close to us*, who travels the path *with us*, even *alongside us*. Our world is illuminated by an *incarnate God, who has also embarked on a path towards humanity*. Our own human pilgrimage towards God corresponds to God’s own pilgrimage towards us. A God who approached out of love to save us, through his own Son Jesus, the Pilgrim of the Father. The path thus becomes *the place of a mutual encounter, a meeting between two pilgrims in hope*.

May God bless you in 2024.

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

Questions to share:

1. *What pilgrimage or pilgrimage walk, do I remember most? What did it teach me?*
2. *My Betharramite life is also like a pilgrimage: what three hopes do I carry in my backpack...?*
3. *Which religious or lay person has been a model of hope for me?*



During the last Council of Congregation (Nov-Dec 2023), the theme that will accompany us in 2024 has been defined:

“Betharramites, pilgrims in Hope”.

The Region Father Augusto Etchecopar proposed a **logo** to illustrate this theme ; it was edited by Luiz Carlos Lima (Brazilian) who provides the following explanations:

- From and to the **Betharramite Heart**, consecrated persons turn in fraternity to the whole world, bringing, from the charism, the Good News of the Kingdom.
- The **consecrated people**, even they belong to different nationalities and ethnic groups, look together at the horizon, are encouraged and driven to walk by doing good in the footsteps of the Founder, Saint Michael Garicoits.
- The **large hands** embrace the fraternity of the consecrated people and of the whole world, in mission and in the *sequela Christi*.
- This mission is being strenghtened and is **expanding** more and more.

Son of God who since his Conception, his Incarnation, his Passion, his Death and his Resurrection has only sought and done the will of his Father to save humanity. In short, what has given me joy throughout this canonical year is the presence of God in my life, his love and all his graces received. To this presence of God is added the moments of spiritual accompaniment that allowed me to know or to know what is good for me, which can help me in my journey in following Christ. For me, spiritual accompaniment and spiritual exercises were very important, because they allowed me not only to know the fundamental aspects of the life of Christ but also to centre my life on the humbled and obedient Christ, to become attached to Him and to detach myself from all that does not contribute or is not related to the kingdom of God. That is why I must let the Lord act in my life. | **Br. Aymar Nam-bomesse (from Central Africa)**

FROM THE BEGINNING OF MY SEMINARY

formation very often, I have heard from different fathers and brothers the words of St. Michael Garicoits: “more for love and any other motive.” I could understand something of it but not fully. During this year of novitiate at Bethlehem, I could understand it in a much more deeper and wider meaning. This was also a time where I felt and experienced this love. Till that moment I understood those words partially,

now I understand it better and better. It helps me also to realize the depth of the spiritual doctrine of St.

Michael Garicoits. During the Ignatian Spiritual exercise, I too had that deeper experience of that love like that of St. John and many other disciples. This love is not important just because we love Jesus but it becomes so important and so precious in as much as Jesus loves me. Out of this love, He gave himself up to us; true as what St. John says in his letter that “God is love.” This love helps me to be at the service of Him by being at the service of our brethren. Thus, living the gospel in the simple way possible. I always thank God for his abundance of love that He showers upon me and around me. Being grateful to the congregation, I continue my journey in formation. | **Br. Joyal Babu (from India)**



From the homily for the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

St Peter's Basilica, Saturday, 6 January 2024



The Magi set out to seek the newborn King. They are an image of the world's peoples journeying in search of God, of the foreigners who now are led to the mountain of the Lord (cf. Is 56:6-7), of those who now, from afar, can hear the message of salvation (cf. Is 33:13), of all those who were lost and now hear the beckoning of a friendly voice. For now, in the flesh of the Babe of Bethlehem, the glory of the Lord has been revealed to all the nations (cf. Is 40:5) and “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Lk 3:6). This is the pilgrimage of humanity, of each of us, moving from distance to closeness.

The Magi have their eyes raised to the heavens, yet their feet are journeying on the earth, and their hearts are bowed in adoration. [...]

First, their eyes are raised to the heavens. The Magi are filled with longing for the infinite, and so they gaze at the stars of the evening sky. They do not pass their lives staring at their feet, self-absorbed, confined by earthly horizons, plodding ahead in resignation or lamentation. They lift their heads high and await the light that can illumine the meaning of their lives, the salvation that dawns from on high. They then see a star, brighter than all others, which fascinates them and makes them set out on a journey. Here we see the key to discovering the real

meaning of our lives: if we remain closed in the narrow confines of earthly things, if we waste away, heads bowed, hostages of our failures and our regrets; if we thirst for wealth and worldly comforts – which are here today and are gone tomorrow – rather than becoming seekers of life and love, our life slowly loses its light. The Magi, who are still foreigners and have not yet encountered Jesus, teach us to fix our sight on high, to lift our eyes to the heavens, to the hills, from which our help will come, for our help is from the Lord (cf. Ps 121:1-2).

[...]

Brothers and sisters, like the Magi, let us raise our eyes to the heavens, let us set out to seek the Lord, let us bow our hearts in adoration. Looking to the heavens, setting out on a journey and adoring. And let us ask for the grace never to lose courage: the courage to be seekers of God, men and women of hope, intrepid dreamers gazing at the heavens, the courage of perseverance in journeying along the roads of this world with the fatigue of a real journey, and the courage to adore, the courage to gaze upon the Lord who enlightens every man and woman. May the Lord grant us this grace, above all the grace to know how to adore. ■



Betharramites, pilgrims in hope



Hope with Saint Michael

| Fr. Pietro Villa scj

On 17th December, just after the Mass ended, Antonio (18 years old, altar server) came to fetch me and hurriedly led me to the centre of the nave. "Look!" he said. At first, I saw nothing but the pews, then suddenly my gaze fell upon... a butterfly. Antonio gently collected it in his hands and took it outside to place it on a branch. Deep inside, I thought, "We can still hope." Yes, hope is allowed as long as there are Antonios who know how to marvel at beauty. And as long as butterflies allow themselves to be captured and carried into endless dreams.

St Michael let himself be led by God and surrendered completely into His arms, as Psalm 130 says. God was his hope. How many times did he invite people to "throw themselves into the arms of the Father," like a child throwing themselves into their mother's arms? A God who is "...both Father and Mother."

With the confidence of a son: "What does it matter to one who possesses God that he lacks anything else! God is with me, so I lack nothing: Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit. Deus meus et omnia." (DS § 30). If there is God, there is everything. That's why St Michael entrusted himself to His Providence. Not for himself, but for the life of the community and for the birth of the Congregation.

Providence was thus present in the poverty of Betharram. It would act through the hands of the same bishop who initially opposed the birth of a new congregation, obtaining in 1838 the authorisation to use the Summary of the Constitutions and Common Rules of the Jesuits; then in 1841, the new constitutions and the name of the Congregation: Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; on 10th September, the bishop received the annual vows of the first eight members.

remember the words of St. Michael Garicoits, "Challenges and joys are mingled together, yes, the double sentiments which must direct all the affections of our life. Challenges need to be pure, perfect but also perfected, strengthened by joys" (DS 30). It had challenged us to entrust ourselves continually saying the same words of our Founder and father, "God is everything...God is my everything and I am nothing" (DS. 54 & 58). Yes. The daily surrender and

the continual faithfulness to Him in following the daily program of the novitiate, led the novices to discover the 'secret spring' of their life; it leads the formators to continue to keep alive themselves in the 'secret spring'.

In conclusion, I am so glad that it became a positive, sincere, enriching and meaningful experience for both the novices as well as for the formators. ■

Testimonies of two brothers novices, Aymar & Joyal



"The Lord has done marvels for me. Holy is his name".

THIS WORD OF THE VIRGIN TO HER COUSIN Elizabeth is how I would like to thank the Lord, for all his blessings received throughout my experience of the canonical novitiate. For during this canonical year I experienced the love of God in my life and, as the Superior General Father Gustavo pointed out at the beginning of the canonical year, "the central objective of the life of the novitiate is joy. Throughout this canonical year, it is a question of remembering and seeking all the wonders of God in our lives." The Ignatian

retreat, spiritual guidance, and daily conferences allowed me to understand how much God loves me and why he created me to praise, honour, and serve him. From the first to the last week of the Ignatian retreat, I experienced this love of God in the forgiveness he granted me, and the possibility he gives me to remain his child despite my limitations and imperfections. To this experience of forgiveness is added the Joy to feeling called by Jesus (Election) despite my sins, my defects and my weaknesses, the Joy as a disciple of Christ to suffer with Him; the joy of meeting the Risen Christ who sends me to witness his love all about me through the witness of my own life. Indeed, throughout these four weeks of exercises I was able to grasp all the dynamics of the Ecce venio of the



ist. My soul is filled with gratitude for God, the living and loving Lord for his steadfast love and kindness.

I remember one of the novices said in confidence at the end of his novitiate experience here in Bethlehem that, "I am so glad to be here and to have a such an experience, I never thought that novitiate would be like this". Whereas another said, "I had really an adult experience of Christ through the various experiences proposed in novitiate particularly in undergoing faithfully the Ignatian exercises". It was overwhelming and great joy to hear from the novices as they had a "profound experience of the love of God in their life" (RL 4 / RF 180).

However, it was interesting to see the journey of the novices who were able to discover that the novitiate is

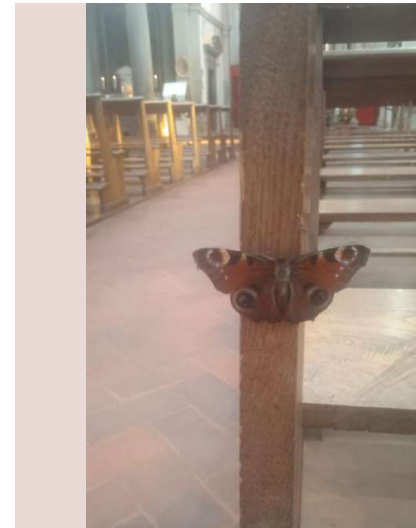
not like any other stages of formation. They were so convinced that a novice cannot bypass the transformation i.e. the 'incessant fermentation' that takes place in him if he is serious about it. It is to say that every stage of formation has its fruits to bear in the formees under the guidance of the respective formators and the formation community. I highly value the internal and external movements that had taken place in them across the weekly accompaniment. It was so beautiful to witness that they were able to have this Christ experience, the inner profound experience of the Love of God. I sincerely appreciate their convictions and inner transformation stirred by the Spirit who is the instigator, animator and protagonist.

At this juncture, I too acknowledge that it was not an easy year. And, I

There was the foundation of the first colleges; in 1856, the opening in America. At the death of St Michael, the bishop would say that yes, he was a saint, but he was won over by an illusion. He released the community from religious ties. However,

St Michael was not won over by an illusion but by trust in divine inspiration. If he couldn't see the birth of the Congregation, he perceived the signs confirming the goodness of this work. The founding principle of his hope was the will of God: "We are useless instruments, whose strength comes only from the hand that uses us. And that's why, acknowledging our weakness, we must dare to say that we are all-powerful (II Cor 12:10). [...] Recognising God's plans where they are and accepting them with love, especially in the cross." (Father, here I am, Chapter VIII § 6, texts presented by Father Pierre Duvignau).

St Michael is like that butterfly that allowed itself to be taken without fluttering its wings, without fear, undisturbed, by the hands of God and let himself be guided by Him. His serenity came from the dedication to doing God's



will, allowing himself to be led by Him in every situation: "Providence will unearth (the obedient) in the recess where his humility and dependence had kept him confined... If he has to show patience, if he sometimes falls short of his work, he can say: 'I am where God

wants me... I know for whom I suffer' (Ps 43:22). So here he is always happy, always content, always blessed by God! While the independent man is always agitated, always unhappy, always cursed by God (Jer 17:5)... Let's live and die where God wants. It is the way to live innocently and die peacefully." (Father, here I am, texts presented by Father Pierre Duvignau scj, Chapter III § 4).

With the goal of life before us: Eternal Life, which is already there by doing what He wants. Because "the will of God is our happiness." God wants our salvation, and for no-one to be lost (Jn 6:39). Thus, no-one is a lost cause, for St Michael, not even at the hour of their last breath, not even the one who takes their own life.

He believed in the possibility of redemption: see the mayor of Cambo, who after St Michael's correction became his friend; or the first director of

the Betharram college, Eliçabide whom he trusted, to whom he expressed his views until the execution of the death penalty, urging him to repent and trust in God's mercy; see also the priest who caused scandal, whom he welcomed into his home and who changed his life... Faced with all difficulties and efforts, his motto was: "Move forward, always." He detested discouragement (he too was tempted to leave, to abandon everything, but he did not give in). St Michael insisted a lot on perseverance, fidelity,

and constancy. Joyful perseverance, just as hope and our "Here I am" are joyful. There is no room for sadness, which like a woodworm, empties the heart and will. He knew how to live out hope with the audacity of the strong. Where strength was based on trust in God. It was in His hands, and for him, heaven had to open. He didn't stop at anything because his hope was in God. St Michael might say with Simone Weil: "One does not overcome fear with courage but with hope." ■

social responsibility, the Church can inspire individuals to reevaluate their priorities and find fulfillment in a more meaningful and connected way of life.

In conclusion, the Karen people, with their distinct cultural identity, contribute to the richness of the Pilgrimage of Hope in Thailand. Convincing more individuals to join the Catholic Church requires an approach that embraces diversity and emphasizes shared values.

Simultaneously, addressing the negative influences of consumerism and selfishness calls for a commitment to promoting a values-based lifestyle centered on community, compassion, and spiritual growth. The pilgrimage becomes a transformative journey not only for individuals but also for communities seeking a path towards a more meaningful and interconnected existence. ■



Pilgrim, what fuels your hope?

| Fr. Constancio Erobaldi scj

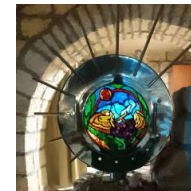
60 years after my priestly ordination (12-8-1963), in harmony with the universal Church and with Betharram, I ask myself: What reasons do I find for hope today? My recent anniversary and my 87 years of life give this question a special context. I look back, at the present and forward and ask myself again: "Constancio, having travelled so much, what fuels your hope?"

So these are the reasons for my hope:

The closeness of a God who, in my many years of life, always



Formation



Conclusion of the first canonical year of the interregional novitiate in Bethlehem

(in photo, tabernacle in the chapel of Nazareth, designed by Fr. Francesco Radaelli scj)

| Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you have made me glad by your works; at the works of your hand I sing for joy"
(Ps. 92:1-4).

It is so true that at the beginning of this inter-regional novitiate at Bethlehem, I had my own fears, worries and

thoughts how is this experience going to be and I had my own anxieties about the unknown people with unknown cultures in the unknown land as it is my first time in Holy Land. Also, three months before the end of the novitiate, the war broke out. It created another adversity and added few more worries.

But, at the end of the Canonical Year of 2023, in St. Joseph inter-regional novitiate at Bethlehem, my sentiments are the same of the psalm-



inclusive journey that embraces people from all walks of life.

Convincing more people, including the Karen community, to join the Catholic Church involves an approach rooted in inclusivity and understanding. Engaging in meaningful dialogue about shared values, fostering cultural exchange, and highlighting the universal message of hope found in Christianity can resonate with individuals seeking spiritual fulfillment. By emphasizing the positive impact of community, compassion, and the shared journey towards a higher purpose, the Catholic Church can invite more members into its fold.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the challenges. Consumerism and selfishness

pose significant obstacles to the pilgrimage of hope. The negative aspects of modern society can distract individuals from the spiritual path, fostering a culture of materialism that often contradicts the core tenets of faith. Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort to promote a values-based approach that encourages selflessness, mindfulness, and a genuine concern for others.

Addressing consumerism and selfishness within the context of the pilgrimage involves highlighting the transformative power of faith in reshaping individual priorities. The Catholic Church can play a role in fostering a sense of community that counters the isolating effects of consumer culture. By promoting values of humility, generosity, and

walked with me and encouraged me to move forward. Always move forward!

I was born in Benevento, southern Italy, in 1936. My parents were Addolorata (Dolores) and Juan. Four years later, my brother Rafael was born. We were a humble family, living in the countryside, 4 km from the city. Mom took care of the household and farm chores; Dad worked in a brick factory and, when he returned home, he continued working, bringing in the crops. Meanwhile, my brother and I lived happily and carefree. We just about got by, but mom and dad sheltered us and, under their protection, we learned to trust...

One morning by the river, while mom was washing the wheat, a plane flew nearby and dropped a bomb on the city... World War II had arrived in Benevento. One night, another plane dropped a flare, which illuminated everything. The night became like the day; Then a squadron appeared, which again bombarded Benevento. It was scary, but mom and dad were with us. Under his protection, God was present, and with my brother we learned not to despair...

Mom died after a problematic pregnancy and, a few months later, dad travelled to Argentina, in search of a new horizon. We were left in the care of my three aunts, mother's sisters. Meanwhile, I began high school at a boarding school, with

great sadness and little desire to study. I remember my aunts' kindness to her rebellious nephew. With what patience and love they took care of me! Through them, God was with us continued to manifest and offer new reasons to hope, even against all hope...

Finally, in 1950, at the age of 14, together with my brother Rafael and my father we permanently emigrated to Argentina. The first year I learned the Spanish language, I re-took the last years of Primary school and, the following year, I returned to Secondary school. Shortly afterward I entered Betharram, on a path of hope that continues to this day. It has been a long road, which I took step by step. In Betharram, in the different communities and in my brethren, I always found reasons to continue hoping...

Affections, which give meaning to life and gladden the heart...

The good Lord has put many valuable people in my path. Through these, I have always experienced the presence of a tender and faithful God. Through these people, the Lord has also made me an instrument of his love for others.

In my old age, I have discovered the importance of friends, who take care of me, give me their affection and make me feel valuable. They are also a treasure to me. As Sirach teaches: *"A faithful friend is priceless, there is no way to estimate*

his value. A faithful friend is a balm of life, found by those who fear the Lord" (Sir 6:14-16).

Service to others, from the priestly ministry.

In serving the communities and brothers entrusted to me, I have always found Jesus, a source of comfort and hope. In particular, in the poorest, humblest and smallest I have found great teachers of hope.

I remember a happy time, in "Conscripto Bernardi", a rural town in the interior. I toured the country and hamlets on foot, by cart or on horseback, rain or shine. I visited families and the sick; We shared the Word and celebrated our faith. At noon they invited me to lunch; At night, a coffee with milk and a country cookie were my only sustenance. It was a very simple life, but meeting people filled me with hope...

The People of God have taught me to be faithful to my name. As Saint Paul says, "we glory even in sufferings themselves, because we know that suffering produces acceptance; acceptance, proven virtue; proven virtue, hope. And hope will not be disappointed, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom 5:3-5).

I have opened my heart to you and shared the reasons for my hope. I have done it with the desire that my motives encourage others, especially those who suffer or have lost their horizon. Forward! Always forward! ■



Betharramites, pilgrims in Hope... in the Ivory Coast

| Fr. Christian Arnaud Yao scj

This theme proposed by the Congregation Council to help us delve into the deep waters of this new year of grace that we must live, leads me to pose a fundamental question

from Jesus himself.

'...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' Lk 18:8



Pilgrimage of Hope in Thailand

| Fr. Jiraphat Raksikhao scj

In the spirit of Christmas, let us reflect on the timeless message of hope and renewal as we embark on a spiritual journey through the **pilgrimage of hope**¹. As the scripture tells us, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). This sacred verse sets the tone for the pilgrimage of hope experienced within the heart of the Catholic Church in Thailand.

My pilgrimage began in the warm embrace of the Thai Mission of Pilgrimage of Hope, where the vibrant tapestry of the Catholic community unfolded before me. Surrounded by the rich cultural heritage of Thailand, I witnessed the fusion of tradition and faith, creating a unique expression of

Catholicism. The pilgrimage, guided by the Thai Mission, allowed me to delve into the depths of spirituality, connecting with the local community and experiencing the profound sense of unity that comes from shared beliefs.

As I traversed the sacred sites and engaged with the Thai people, it became evident that the Catholic Church plays a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual landscape of this nation. The pilgrimage was not merely a physical journey but a profound exploration of the spiritual terrain, where the roots of Catholicism have intertwined with the cultural fabric of Thailand. The Thai Mission's commitment to fostering a pilgrimage of hope resonated in every prayer, gesture, and shared moment, creating an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.

The Karen people, a vibrant hill tribe in Thailand, added a unique dimension to this pilgrimage experience. Their cultural richness intertwined seamlessly with the broader tapestry of the Catholic Church. The Karen community's participation became a celebration of diversity, demonstrating that the pilgrimage of hope is an

1) Each year, in March/April, takes place the Pilgrimage of Hope in the Diocese of Chiang Mai, changing area every year. It involves Betharramites religious, sisters of Maepon, lay people and members of the Diocese. In the footsteps of Jesus who was born among us, we journey together with the mountain villagers. As spiritual leaders we have to live and accompany our believers by being with them, by witnessing and living the Gospel so that they may see Jesus in us. So, during this pilgrimage of hope, we journey and accompany our mountain villagers both physically and spiritually.

so that the presence of God-with-us becomes more evident 'here and now', in the face of this specific situation that challenges us? What can we do as a community, according to our personal charisms and possibilities, and how to discover it synodally by 'getting to work', through a purposeful discernment that translates into an attitude and effective service towards the "stranger on the road" (FT, II)?

5. Hope and mercy

A good GPS is mercy: mercy and hope are linked, in the same way that indifference and scepticism are linked on the opposite path. Mercy starts from the concrete neighbour, from the Other who challenges me from the outside. Listening to that specific other, seeking to understand the heart of him who speaks to us face to face, allows us to discover the most appropriate path and strategies.

6. Hope and availability

Getting on the road is to gently follow the impulses of the Holy Spirit, translating them into prudent suitable options: this is the ABC of evangelical availability. Spiritual and pastoral discernment lead to concrete decisions, (even if debatable!) but which are like steps on the path. Each of them is associated with hopes that will try to update and renew Hope. Some will end up being realised, others will be corrected or even abandoned, but in all cases

we will have to put generous energy into them: the best of each person at every step.

7. Pilgrims in hope

Life is a pilgrimage in Hope, which is nourished by contemplative listening, creative discernment and generous decisions. It starts from the conviction that, because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), the Three-in-One God inhabits our world. In a broad sense, each thing, person and event is a sacrament of that presence: creation, fraternity and Kingdom that are revealed as good news in the joyful announcement of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*). On the other hand, this mystical perception of the world and human history invites us to prophecy: to ensure that more and more things, people and events are ordered to God's eschatological project, and that in each of these realities things happen, fulfilling his Will.

We are "missionary disciples" (*Document of Aparecida*, chapter II) and pilgrims in hope: because (mystical) gratitude for the love of God that is revealed in every thing, person and event, leads us to the gratuitousness (prophetic) of the love that it is also given through us in those same realities. Gratitude and gratuitousness open the path of life to HOPE. ■

Today, this question from Jesus forces us into deep reflection in a world in perpetual change. A world where the worship of God is tending to disappear; a world where sects are already recruiting in schools to impose their dominance. In fact, a world where the cult of the individual is flourishing. The list is not exhaustive.

Yes, it is in such a context that we still have to answer this question from Jesus.

The spirituality of the Incarnate Word consists of the Son's response to the Father – 'Here I am' – to serve the purposes of His Love, in which we live. Is it not a source of Hope for this world?

'It has pleased God to make Himself loved, and while we were still his enemies, he loved us so much that he sent his only Son: He gave Him to us to be the magnet which draws us to divine love, to be the model which shows us the dynamic of love, and to be the means of attaining divine love: the Son of God became man.' (Manifesto of Saint Michael Garicoïts)

We all notice that Love becomes incarnate. Starting from this fact, God wanted to join man, His beloved, in his humanity and become one flesh with Him (We form the same body...). In Jesus, this love of God became visible, audible, and palpable. 1 Jn 1:1-3 tells us so well: 'what we have heard, what we have seen, what our

hands have touched... we proclaim to you.' Is it not this momentum that animates us, Betharramites? To bring the same happiness to others?

Indeed, the richness of the charism of our Congregation, left to us by our Father Founder Michael Garicoïts, is a treasure; in fact, an adequate response to the calls of this world in search of guidance. We, the religious of Betharram, are ambassadors of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Consequently, this compels us to live in concrete reality and to embody this Heart of Jesus; a Heart so loving, so expansive, so gentle, so humble... That produces an unparalleled dedication to whoever discovers it in daily activity, no matter how insignificant; that puts man back on his feet.

Fortunately, our charism still interests the Church today, the Church in the Ivory Coast. The calls from different dioceses, yesterday and even today, show how well we can deploy the greatness of charity within the limits of our position. Yes, today, we are still called to continue offering young people a good education, and we try to respond through our social work called *Tshanfeto* (Arise), which aims to uplift man. Uplift him to face the various events of life. A work that restores man's dignity as a child of God. Because it is about man. Yes, to save man in his entirety. Moreover, we respond very well to

the call to education, through the Saint Jean Marie Vianney College in Katiola, where the brothers on mission devote themselves promptly, without reservation and without expecting anything in return, to the proper education of secondary school students. A service that is appreciated and praised. Not only that, but we must not forget to mention the parishes under our care that are in perpetual progress. We appreciate the trust of the bishops in the dioceses where we are present in certain diocesan responsibilities through the choice of our brothers.

A Betharramite still has much to give. The calls are numerous, and the Lord does not remain silent before our supplications. In response to our prayers, He raises up numerous vocations that we rejoice in. This further strengthens us, the religious people that we are, as our source continues to attract those thirsty for God in a time when vocational dryness is felt. The Lord invites us to welcome and take care of them. Let us take care of our vocations, indeed, let us take care of our brothers. Because it is there that we will be recognized as children of God; children of the same Father. And to do this, let humility dwell in all of us; imitating Jesus Christ who shared our all our humanity, except for sin. He is our model; He is the one whom Michael Garicoïts followed without hesitation. He is the one given to

us to contemplate in the charism to which he prompts us.

So, let no excuse handicap us. Let us be filled with a sense of confidence in the future, which carries us with strong hope towards the realization of God's plan. It starts with our communities where communion, communication, mutual trust, sharing, and mercy must be lived, and then, in our places of mission, through genuine closeness. Remember, love becomes incarnate. Let us embody this in our community missions; let us embody this in our respective boundaries. Because that's where the Father wants us.

All these expectations inevitably immerse us in a journey of Hope in the Church of the Ivory Coast today. They lead us to identify priorities and these are the mechanisms that should be put in place in order to live as Betharramites.

Forgive the shortcomings of this hesitant message from your young brother. Happy and holy year to all. Onwards Always! ■



Life as a pilgrimage

| Fr. Gerardo Ramos scj

1. Pilgrims

We are *homines viatores*, (= travelling people) we are on the way to the heavenly homeland. This conviction is the anchor of our HOPE. But "*we cannot be citizens of heaven by being fugitives from the earthly city*" (Argentine Bishops, 2001). HOPE is nourished and renewed every day through the effort to contribute to a world more in accordance with God's will, more oriented towards his Kingdom.

2. Hope and hopes

The great theological virtue of Hope (with a capital letter) of "*a new heaven and a new earth*" (Rev 21:1) does not annul, but rather enables, encourages and stimulates, human hopes (with a small letter) that embody noble, stimulating and consistent projects of connection with others, committed to comprehensive development. Pope Francis reminds us that today these initiatives are particularly associated with two 'signs of the times': the care of the common home (*Laudato si'*, with all that this implies on the human, ecological, economic & spiritual levels) and universal brotherhood (*Fratelli tutti* [FT]), with implications on pastoral,

social, political and international levels. Without idolizing them or giving up, but allowing them to be absorbed and then letting ourselves be guided by that great Hope of being with the Lord, which is always more and better, human hopes are those that are 'seriously worth it'.

3. Listen, discern and walk

We have celebrated Christmas. The great Hope makes us listen to daily hopes in each person as a son or daughter of God: "*The joys and hopes, sadness and anguish of men today, particularly of the poor...*" (GS §1). Like MARY, it invites us to realise that today many people "*have no wine*" (Jn 2:3). This empathetic perception should open us to true discernment, like JOHN THE BAPTIST: "*Are you the one who should come or do we have to wait for another?*" (Luke 7:19). Beyond the puzzle the question expresses, this concern leads us to set out on the path, opening energising and creative processes like the MAGI of the East (Pope Francis, To the Roman Curia, 12/21/2023).

4. The synodal magis here and now

What is the best thing I can do,