Go forward with Hope

2018 is drawing to a close and already our friends and supporters are out around the parishes, promoting our calendar, in Scotland, and on mission appeals in England and Ireland inviting people to receive a copy to guide them through 2019 celebrating the wonderful liturgical feast days.

As we wait for Christmas we wait specially to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. This time of waiting is Advent – four weeks of reflection and prayer in a spirit of great expectancy. It is a valuable time to ponder and look at our lives and ask God’s blessing on our families. Thank the Lord for the year coming to an end. Remember family and friends who have gone before us.

For many, perhaps the outgoing year has been a bit tough with bereavements, illness and disappointments but we raise our minds in hope to welcome Christ the shining Light.

For the Church it has been a harsh period of scandals and cover-ups. Pope Francis in Ireland (pg. 7) not for the first time pleaded for forgiveness and mercy for the guilty Church. It is a complicated matter and all we ask for is mutual reconciliation and solidarity with the Holy Father and his mammoth but always divine mission.

On the cover page of the calendar we can read and agree wholeheartedly with the Pope’s call: “That the breath of the Holy Spirit may engender a new missionary spring in the Church!”

We are completing our Mission Appeal ministry in the Archdiocese of Birmingham, deaneries in Scotland also in Ireland. Sincere thanks to priests and people for their welcome and constant love and support of the missions!

In this current edition of ‘Comboni Mission’ we can read about the heroic work of Doctors, Sisters and lay people in the Nuba mountains (pgs16-18) and the good work of Fr Zanotelli (pgs.4-5-6) and many others. We are enriched by their example.

Dear Readers and Friends many thanks for your support throughout this year!

“In the year ahead may the Love of God enfold us. In good days and bad, in our struggles and in our joys, may the light Of Jesus lead us forward in hope. Amen”

Go forward with Hope
Sudan:
A Church rooted in the Gospel and two famous saints

We hear much more about the Church in South Sudan and less about its northern neighbour, the Republic of Sudan. What is it like to be a Christian and a Catholic in this predominantly Muslim country? Vatican News spoke to the Archbishop of Khartoum, Michael Didi Adgum Mangoria.

“In every centre, every place (in Sudan) we do not conclude prayer without saying, ‘Saint Bakhita pray for us, Saint Comboni pray for us.’” This is the assertion of the Archbishop of Khartoum, Michael Didi Adgum Mangoria, in the Vatican recently. The Sudanese prelate was referring to two beloved saints venerated by Catholics throughout the world.

Saints Bakhita and Comboni are Sudan’s gift to the Church

The two saints are Sudan’s gift to the universal Church: St. Josephine Bakhita is the patron saint of Sudan and of human trafficking survivors. Born in Darfur, Sudan, her feast day is 8 February.

Saint Daniel Comboni, an Italian, founded the Comboni Missionaries. Comboni, who had a strong connection with Sudan, also had a grand vision for Africa in general. At the time it was uncommon to speak about Africa in the manner he did. His vision for Africa is captured in his motto, “Save Africa with Africa.” Comboni’s feast day is 10 October.

In our time, we hear much more about the Church in South Sudan and less about the Church in the Republic of Sudan. What is it like to be a Christian and a Catholic in this predominantly Muslim country? Speaking to Vatican News, Archbishop Didi Adgum Mangoria acknowledged the strong faith of Christians in his country and, in general, is happy about the peaceful co-existence with Muslims. He nevertheless concedes that there are challenges.
Fr. Alex, you just turned 80.
How would you sum up your life?
I am happy. I am happy to have given my life for the marginalized, the poorest of the poor, those who do not count in society, remembering the advice of Jesus: if you keep your life for yourself, you are already dead. If you dare to give it to others, then you live. I staked all my life on this teaching by Jesus. And, at 80, I feel as alive as ever.

Do you have any regrets? Something you would have liked to do and didn’t make it?
Many are the things I would have liked to have done, and didn’t do. But life is not lived to do things, but to be spent for a just cause: the others.

Did you ever regret choices you made?
No. I lost many battles, but even though we are defeated when we are the voice of a minority, I never regretted the choices I made and the paths I walked.

Which defeat weighs heaviest on you?
That I did not win the battle in favour of the poor. We are all part of a system that allows the eight richest people in the world to own as much as 3.6 billion poor people around the world. The Davos statistics tell us that 1% of the world population owns more wealth than the other 99%. I spent my life for the marginalized, but I have not been able to even nick people’s consciences. For me, this is a burdensome defeat. Wealth and poverty in Mumbai.

Who has been the most important influence in your life?
My Dad. There were seven of us, brothers and sisters, and he would say: Always be proud of yourselves. I can do it, because I never bowed to anyone. He was against Fascism and the militia tried to shoot him down, but he was able to get away. He carried a bullet in his right arm as long as he lived. And then my mother, she was the other great model in my life. Her example marked me deeply.

And among the people you met in your life, whom do you remember most?
I have been influenced by great witnesses. When I was studying in the United States, it was Martin Luther King, for example. Then it was Desmond Tutu fighting against apartheid. And in Latin America, people like Bishop Helder Camara of Recife.

Fr. Alex, why did you become a priest?
Ever since I was a young boy, I always felt that life is beautiful if you give it for something great. Then, one day, a Comboni Missionary came through Livo, in Val di Non, where I lived and said: Why don’t you come to Africa with us? My adventure with Comboni started there…

Things have changed since then. The churches are empty, the priests are old and tired. What happened?
The heart of the problem is human emptiness, even before being a Christian problem. There used to be a feeling of social solidarity, but today I do not sense a feeling of community. If the human soul of a community dies, so does the Christian spirit. Today Europe is pagan again. I think its time to do mission in Europe. Even the Church needs to make a serious examination of conscience on what it has done and on what it has not done.

But there has to be something good remaining in our valleys.
Yes, I still see the generosity of the people. This is positive. But I notice that it is easy to be generous when we speak of adoption at a distance, but not so much when we want to welcome our refugee and immigrant brothers and sisters.

Do you still find faith in our communities?
When I went to live in the slum of Korogocho, near Nairobi, I had my own doubts. I was about to side with Marx on religion as the opium of the people. But in Africa, the poor converted me. Their faith was so much deeper than mine. In them I saw the strength of life and, since I believe in the God of life, this vital strength is life, which over here many have lost.

Then, is there any use for religion today?
Today the West needs religion, God, more than ever. If we do not show them the face of God, they will look for surrogates. The human person is certainly a political and economic animal, but is above all religious. It looks for meaning in things.

If there is this need, why can’t the Church answer it?
In the West, the Church has become part of the system: this is the problem. Look at Poland where, rosary in hand, efforts are made to reject the hungry who knock at the door of hospitality. We married the system and it uses the Church. They will come from the south of the world to convert us.

Fr. Alex, are you afraid of death?
(A moment of silence) No, I am at peace. I have loved life so much, risking it for others, that I feel alive, even at 80.

How do you imagine the Beyond?
I believe in the God of life, and that’s what is waiting for me.

You spent eight years in Sudan, 11 in Kenya. Do you miss Africa?
Yes, a lot. Here at home we have no clue of the humanity the poor have. This is why I have settled in the Sanità area of Naples in Italy because this is where mission with the poor is. Humanly speaking I deeply miss Africa. The poor know how to show you their support, even with simple gestures. Here instead we live in isolation, in a consumeristic society that has turned us into commodities.
Fr. Alex, for the last 14 years you have been living in Naples surrounded by crime and drug trafficking. How can you speak of hope?

Hope starts from within us, if we succeed in changing ourselves. We start from the peripheries. I fight to have schools in Naples, opened all day. This is the only way to stop the largest drug trafficking centre in Europe.

Does Africa have a future? China, India, Russia are grabbing a lot of territory and investing a lot in Africa. What do you think?

Yes, the rape of Africa continues. On top of that you have climate change and desertification. By 2050 in Europe we will have 250 million climate change refugees, 50 million just from Africa. Temperatures will increase and make many areas uninhabitable… We should help Africans at home. But our politicians only go to Africa to look for oil and minerals. Last year alone we gave Africa weapons for a total of €10 billion. Is this the way to help Africa? By helping to kill one another? Then you wonder why people run away from there.

This coming Sunday you turn 80. How will you celebrate?

I will be with the young people of my neighborhood here in Naples. We will have some bible study. Hope comes from them. There are still many great young people around.

What are your projects for the future? Naples, Africa, your hometown?

Not my hometown. I am thinking of asking my superiors to let me go back to Africa. It is my dream. Even though I realize that the priorities of mission are now here, in the slums of our cities, to witness to alternative life styles. To give hope.

Link to the original full text:
An estimated crowd of 500,000 people gathered in Dublin’s Phoenix Park for the closing Mass of the World Meeting of Families on Sunday afternoon. St John Paul II celebrated Mass here in 1979. When he died in 2005, the Irish faithful gathered for a Vigil to remember the man who had told the youth of the country, “young people of Ireland, I love you.”

Upon his arrival, Pope Francis was welcomed by the Archbishop of Dublin, Mgr. Diarmuid Martin, who accompanied him on the popemobile to complete the tour among the faithful.

At the beginning of Mass, the Pope made the following penitential act:

Yesterday, I met with eight survivors who have suffered abuse of power, of conscience and sexual abuse. Taking up on what they said to me, I want to place the man who had told the youth of the country, “young people of Ireland, I love you.”

We ask forgiveness for the times that as a Church we did not show survivors of all kinds of abuse: compassion and the search for justice and truth through concrete actions. We ask forgiveness.

We ask forgiveness for some members of the Church’s hierarchy who did not take charge of these painful situations and kept quiet. We ask forgiveness.

We ask forgiveness for the children who

The Church asks forgiveness like the Prodigal Son

In this edition we present the text of Pope Francis’ words at the Mass in Phoenix Park Dublin in August 2018. It can serve as a souvenir for our readers: words to be remembered daily, – conversion as a daily task both for the institutional church and each person.
were taken away from their moms and for all those times when many single mothers were told that to seek their children who had been separated from them - and the same was told to their daughters and sons who were looking for their mothers - that this was a mortal sin. This is not a mortal sin but the Fourth Commandment. We ask forgiveness.

Pope Francis preached to the large crowd:
‘You have words of eternal life!’ (Jn 6:68).

At the conclusion of this World Meeting of Families, we gather as a family around the table of the Lord. We thank the Lord for the many blessings received in our families. We want to commit ourselves to live fully our vocation to be, according to the touching words of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, “love in the heart of the Church”.

In this precious moment of communion with one another and with the Lord, it is good to pause and consider the source of all the good things we have received. Jesus reveals the origin of these blessings in today’s Gospel, when he speaks to his disciples. Many of them were upset, confused and even angry, debated whether to accept his “harsh words”, so contrary to the wisdom of this world. In reply, the Lord tells them directly: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63).

These words, with their promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, are overflowing with life for us who welcome them in faith. They indicate the ultimate source of all the good that we have experienced and celebrated here in these days: The Spirit of God, who constantly breathes new life on the world, in hearts, in families, in homes and in parishes. Every new day in the life of our families, and every new generation, brings with it the promise of a new Pentecost, a domestic Pentecost, a new outpouring of the Spirit, the Paraclete, which Jesus sends us as our Advocate, our Comforter and the One who it really gives us courage.

How much does the world need of this encouragement which is God’s gift and promise! As one of the fruits of this celebration of family life, may you return to your homes and become a source of encouragement for others, to share with them “the words of eternal life” of Jesus. In fact, your families are both a privileged place and an important means to spread those words as “good news” for everyone, especially for those who wish to leave the desert and the “house of slavery” (cf. Gs 24:17) to go to the promised land of hope and freedom.

In today’s second reading, St Paul tells us that marriage is a participation in the mystery of Christ’s perennial fidelity to his bride, the Church (cf. Eph 5:32). However, this teaching, although magnificent, can appear to someone as a “hard word”. Why live in love, as Christ loved us (cf. Eph 5:2), involves the imitation of his own self-sacrifice, involves dying to ourselves to be reborn to a greater and more lasting love. That love that alone can save the world from the slavery of sin, from selfishness, from greed and indifference towards the needs of the less fortunate. This is the love we have known in Jesus Christ. It has become incarnate in our world through a family, and through the witness of Christian families in every generation it has the power to break every barrier to reconcile the world with God and make of us what we have always been destined to be: a single human family that lives together in justice, holiness, peace.

The task of bearing witness to this Good News is not easy. However, the challenges facing Christians today are, in their own way, no less difficult than those faced by the first Irish missionaries. I think of Saint Columbanus, who with his small group of comrades brought the light of the Gospel to European lands in an era of darkness and cultural decadence. Their extraordinary missionary success was not based on tactical methods or strategic plans, no, but on a humble and liberating docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It was their daily testimony of fidelity to Christ and among them that conquered the hearts that ardently desired a word of grace and which contributed to the birth of European culture.

Naturally, there will always be people who will oppose the Good News, which will “murmur” against his “harsh words”. However, like Saint Columbanus and his...
companions, who faced icy waters and stormy seas to follow Jesus, let us never let ourselves be influenced or discouraged by the icy gaze of indifference or the stormy winds of hostility.

However, we humbly recognize that if we are honest with ourselves, we can also find the teachings of Jesus hard. How hard it is always to forgive those who hurt us! What a challenge it is always to welcome the migrant and the stranger! How painful it is to endure disappointment, rejection, betrayal! How uncomfortable it is to protect the rights of the frailest, the unborn or the older, which seem to disturb our sense of freedom.

However, it is precisely in those circumstances that the Lord asks us: “Do you also want to go away?” (Jn 6:67). With the power of the Spirit that encourages us and with the Lord always at our side, we can answer: “We have believed and known that you are the Holy One of God” (verse 69). With the people of Israel, we can repeat: ‘We will serve the Lord, for he is our God” (Josh24:18).

With the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, every Christian is sent to be a missionary, a “missionary disciple” (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 120). The Church as a whole is called to “go out” to bring the words of eternal life to the peripheries of the world. May this our celebration of today confirm each of you, parents and grandparents, children and young people, men and women, brothers and sisters, contemplatives and missionaries, deacons and priests and bishops, in sharing the joy of the Gospel! May you share the Gospel of the family as a joy for the world!

In preparing ourselves to take each one our own way, let us renew our fidelity to the Lord and to the vocation to which he has called each of us. By making our prayer of Saint Patrick, we repeat each one with joy: “Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ beside me, Christ below me, Christ above me” (repeats it in Gaelic). With the joy and strength conferred by the Holy Spirit, let us confidently say to him: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

Before the final blessing, Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, announced the decision of the Holy Father to hold the tenth Meeting World Family Day in Rome in 2021, on the 5th anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia.
One legend says that the wise men were of three different ages. Caspar was a very young man, Balthazar was in his middle age and Melchior was an old man.

When they arrived at Bethlehem, the three of them took themselves to the cave of the Saviour’s birth, and they went in one at a time.

When Melchior the old man went into the cave, there was no one there but a very old man his own age with whom he was quickly at home. They spoke together of memory and gratitude.

The middle-aged Balthazar encountered a middle-aged teacher when he went into the cave, and they talked passionately of leadership and responsibility.

When young Caspar entered, he met a young prophet and they spoke of reform and promise.

When they had all gone outside after going in one by one, the three of them took their gifts and went in together. And when they went in together there was nobody there but a twelve-day-old infant. Later on, they understood. The Saviour speaks to every stage of life.

The old hear the call to honesty and wisdom. The middle-aged hear the call to witness and responsibility. The young hear the call to heroism and love.
At Midnight Mass we sing: **GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND PEACE ON EARTH TO PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL.** Such seasonal good wishes show how we keenly desire to have peaceful relationships with everyone around us.

Humanly speaking, in front of any tiny newly born baby, you naturally tone down the noise in case you awaken or frighten it. It is unthinkable for anyone to fight or harm a tiny vulnerable baby just born. Can you imagine, if you fight with a baby, how stupid and ridiculous you would look?

Today Bethlehem, where this little baby came into the world over 2018 years ago, is tightly gripped in the iron claws of a never-ending war between Israel and Palestine where Donald Trump’s USA policy is deeply embroiled. Many people consider the whole political situation as an unmitigated disaster where thousands of people have died and millions of refugees are seeking food and shelter. Bethlehem, a Palestinian city, lies roughly six miles from Jerusalem with about 25,000 people. The actual birthplace of the Infant Jesus is, in fact, administered by the Palestinian authorities these days.

No one in their senses wants war, especially a protracted one that favours a strongly recognised military Israel against a weakly resourced and non-acknowledged nationless Palestine. Violence we know breeds violence and how the heart of humankind can contrive such violence!

A great German mystic called Meister Eckhart maintained: **ALL GOD WANTS OF PEOPLE IS A PEACEFUL HEART.**

Very recently Pope Francis said:

*The Gospel reminds us that true peace is ultimately God’s gift, it flows from a healed and reconciled heart and branches out to embrace the entire world. Yet it also requires constant conversion on our part as the source of those spiritual resources needed to build a society of authentic solidarity, justice and service of the common good.*

(Dublin Castle, Saturday 25th August, 2018).

How very often we are reminded that peace is the fruit of justice. It was Pope John XXIII, who helped in the elaboration of the UN Human Rights Charter that maintained that a peaceful man does better than a learned one. Peace is a full-time job all the year round and not only on Christmas Day. Peace like war must be waged. It is the only war worth waging but peace can never be achieved by using belligerent B52 bombers, cruise missiles, drones, tanks and guns against an enemy. At the end of the day one must firmly believe in peace and work extremely hard at it throughout one’s whole life.

On that first Christmas Morning God sent His only begotten Son born of the Virgin Mary into the world. Later the child Jesus was to leave the warm peaceful rhythmic breathing of the surrounding animals in that stable to challenge for some thirty years the world of ambitious ruthless grown-ups.
The Beatitudes
“Christian’s identity card”
(Part 2)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”.

There are those who desire justice and yearn for righteousness with similar intensity. They will be satisfied, for sooner or later justice will come. Not the justice that the world gives, often mired in corruption, ensnared in the daily politics of quid pro quo, where everything becomes business. How many people suffer injustice, standing by powerlessly, while others give up fighting for real justice and opt to follow in the train of the winners. This has nothing to do with the hunger and thirst for justice that Jesus praises. True justice comes about in people’s lives when they themselves are just in their decisions; it is expressed in their pursuit of justice for the poor and the weak. “Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness”.

Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping and serving others, but it also includes forgiveness and understanding. “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you” (Mat-
Giving and forgiving means reproducing in our lives some small measure of God’s perfection, which gives and forgives superabundantly. For this reason, Luke does not say, “Be perfect”, but rather, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.” Let us give heed and we would often listen the reproach: “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”

Those whose hearts are simple, pure and undefiled, have a heart capable of love admit nothing that might harm, weaken or endanger that love. “Man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart”. Certainly, there can be no love without works of love, but the Lord expects a commitment that comes from the heart, for “if I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have no love, I gain nothing”. From the heart proceeds the desires and decisions that move us forwards. When a heart loves God and neighbour, genuinely and not merely in words, is a pure heart; it can see God. “Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness”.

Peacemakers truly “make” peace; they build peace and friendship in society. Jesus makes this promise: “They will be called children of God”. God exhorts to work for peace, “along with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart”, for “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”. This peace excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart, since it is not about creating “a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority”, or a project “by a few for the few”. Instead, it “faces conflict head on, resolves it and makes it a link in the chain of a new process”. To be artisans of peace, for building peace, is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill. “Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.”

The path of the Gospel goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. How many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice. The thirst for power and worldly interests often stands against justice. In an alienated society, trapped in its social organization, politics, mass communications and economic, cultural and even religious institutions that entangle any authentic human and social development, living the Beatitudes becomes difficult and can be viewed negatively, regarded with suspicion, and met with ridicule. Persecution becomes thus inevitable. Persecutions are not a reality of the past, for today too we experience them, whether by the shedding of blood, as is the case with so many contemporary martyrs, or by more subtle means, by slander and lies. “Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems; that is holiness.” (Gaudium Evangelii n° 90-94).
NICARAGUA: The Church Under Threat

Bishops and priests threatened with death. Churches profaned. Nevertheless, the Church has become a sign of hope and strength for many.

The white walls of the Divine Mercy church in Managua show the marks of bullets. Even the large image of the Merciful Jesus has been hit. For twelve hours, the parish in front of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (Unan) was under fire from different directions by paramilitary groups, the so-called “Turbas”. It was they who, on the 16th July, attacked the athenaeum – occupied since May by students protesting against President Daniel Ortega.

They waited for sunset to take the students by surprise. It was nothing less than a brutal blitz. The paramilitaries attacked the students who sought cover behind the barricades with high calibre guns. One of the students died in the first attack. Another, seriously wounded, died a few hours later at Divine Mercy Church. More than a hundred took refuge there, fleeing from the volleys of the “Turbas”. Fathers Raúl Zamora and Erick Alvarado, who were at the parish, admitted them and improvised a field hospital to take care of the fourteen wounded. The paramilitaries, however, had not given up the hunt and began to fire on the church, wounding two more students.

Rosary in hand, some standing while others knelt, the students prayed, alternating the prayers with old revolutionary songs. They were rescued by the Papal Nuncio Mons. Waldemar Stanislaw Sommertag, and Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes, Archbishop of Managua. At dawn, after a night spent mediating, they both came to Divine Mercy Church with buses to take the students to safety. They were accompanied by UN representatives and members of the Inter-American Court for Human Rights.

On countless occasions, the Church has to rush to rescue groups of demonstrators in the sights of agents and paramilitaries. The most famous episode took place at Masaya on the 21st June, when the bishops formed a human shield for the demonstrators. On the 9th July, in Diriamba, the bishops were attacked by the “Turbas” and beaten. “It was a cowardly attack”, declared Cardinal Brenes on Twitter. “The road of violence is a road with no exit. Problems must be resolved by reasoning and dialogue”, added Mons. Báez, wounded in the right arm during the attack, as was Fr. Edwin Román, nicknamed the “Hero Parish Priest”. The latter, a grandson of the Father of the nation, Augusto Sandino, defended with prophetic courage the inhabitants of Masaya. On account of his commitment he has received several death threats, just like Mons. Báez and many other prelates.

The protests which began in April, in opposition to a reform of social security that Ortega wanted to impose unilaterally, were immediately brutally suppressed by the forces of order and militant Sandinista groups. The iron fist endured by the population is seen as a total betrayal by Ortega, who in the seventies led the Sandinista revolution that overthrew the dictatorial regime of Anastasio Somoza. Now, the people say, he himself has become a dictator just like the one he overthrow.

According to the Organisation for Human Rights in Nicaragua, in the last four months there have been 440 deaths, more than 2,000 wounded, 280 disappeared and 500 people arrested.

President Ortega of Nicaragua says he does not want Mons. Baez, Auxiliary Bishop of Managua in the Commission for Dialogue which, for some months now, mediated by the Catholic Church, civil society, the business sector, the un-
ions and the student movement, have been meeting with a government delegation to find a solution to the crisis. Early in August, the foreign minister of Nicaragua, Denis Moncada, went to the Vatican to seek the removal of Mons. Baez.

Mons. Silvio José Báez creates trouble for the regime. On several occasions he used the social media to criticise the government. President Ortega and his Vice-President wife Rosario Murillo know very well that Mons. Báez is listened to by the people. He is from Masaya, the city that sparked the rising of July 1979 that put an end to the Somoza dynasty. He is a Carmelite religious.

He calmly states “I have always believed that this society (of Nicaragua) would rise up due to the structural, social, political and economic problems. The youth have awakened the whole of society when they became aware that Nicaragua could be different and better”. In the view of Mons. Báez, what is happening in the country is “an opportunity to show the true face of the Church that many do not know and that the religious have never been able to show”.

Speaking of politics, Mons. explains “As Christians we are called to do our part not only in our personal, family and professional life but also within the economic system, in our political options, in building up society and exercising our rights and duties, seeking the common good”.

The government accuses him of engaging in politics. “There is politics in the strict sense which is that of party politics whose aim is to gain power to exercise it in society. But politics in the broad sense is that which all citizens must practice and in which we are all involved”, says Monsignor.
The Nuba Mountains region in southern Sudan is a land the world has largely forgotten, except for the Catholic Church, which for more than three decades has stood with the people as they endured hunger, bombing and neglect.

“There was nothing in the Nuba Mountains, no salt, no soap, no clothes. Then Bishop Macram started coming, bringing supplies, helping the people survive,” said Father Thomas Tiscornia, a Maryknoll priest from Hoboken, New Jersey, referring to Bishop Macram Max Gassis of El Obeid, Sudan, who now is retired.

“Then he started bringing in books and began a primary school in Kauda. He dug wells so people would have clean water. After that came the hospital and the clinics. Bishop Macram brought dignity and life to the Nuba people,” Father Tiscornia told Catholic News Service.

The priest has served three stints as a pastor and teacher in the Nuba Mountains, a liberated region in Sudan that borders neighbouring South Sudan. The rebels who control the territory have fought a decades-long struggle against the government in Khartoum.

Church workers in the region have shared the same risks as the people they serve.

“The whole ministry of the church has focused on being present, on saying to the people, ‘You’re important. You’re loved.’ We were there to be with the people and share their fate, even if it meant diving into foxholes when the Antonovs appeared overhead,” Father Tiscornia said, referring to Russian-made planes the Sudanese Armed Forces has used to bomb civilian targets.

Father Daniel Tutu Kuku, a Nuba himself, is a priest in Heiban, where he survived years of bombing.

Fr. Zacharia Osman is the parish priest in Lug. The area is controlled by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and frequently attacked by the military of Sudan Fr. Osman was born in Lug.

“The job of the priest is to stay with the people, to gather them, to pray with them, to encourage them. If we run away, what good are we? We have to die.
Sr Nyakuru converses with Dr Tom Catena

with our people, on the ground. Not to run away. We are not cowards,” he told CNS.

Comboni Sister Angelina Nyakuru has served for a decade as head nurse at the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, where she learned to trust the instincts of children to stay safe.

“The children have better hearing, so they hear the planes first. I see them running and my body starts running as well. If they hear the bombs falling before I get to the foxhole, they yell at me, ‘Sister, lay down,’ and I hit the ground,” she said.

Sister Nyakuru, a native of Uganda, said the children also convinced her to wear her grey habit rather than her white one during periods of bombing, claiming it makes her less of a target.

A partial cease-fire since early 2016 has stopped the bombing of Nuba communities.

John Ashworth, a former Mill Hill missionary priest who serves as an adviser to the Catholic bishops in Sudan and South Sudan, said the church is in a unique situation to help the Nuba people.

“The United Nations and most international agencies only go where it’s safe and easy. Although they think they’re working under terrible hardship conditions, when it gets dangerous, they declare level four and evacuate. If the government pressures them, they leave. We in the church don’t work under those restraints, and we accept the risk that comes with maintaining our presence in difficult settings,” said Ashworth, who ministered as a priest in the Nuba Mountains in the 1980s.

Children at the well. Hundreds of wells have been drilled in the Nuba mountains by the Catholic Church, which has also sponsored schools and health care facilities throughout the war-torn region.
Push came to shove for church workers in the region in 2011, when Bishop Gassis ordered all foreigners working for the church to leave. That included priests, sisters, nurses, engineers and teachers. He sent three planes to clandestine airstrips to pluck them out. Not everyone obeyed.

Sister Nyakuru was one who refused, even though her Comboni provincial superior ordered her out. She went over her head and called the order’s superior general on a satellite phone.

“I told her that if I had to leave, to not let me return because it would be bad to leave and then, once the situation got better, to come back,” Sister Nyakuru said. “That means if there’s trouble I run, and if not, I stay. I said I wouldn’t do that.”

Her appeal worked, and she remained at the hospital with Dr. Tom Catena, a U.S. lay missionary who also refused to leave. Several other priests and religious brothers also stayed despite the bishop’s order.

Bishop Gassis said he was moved by the refusal of some to leave. “I wanted to evacuate them because I was afraid for their lives. But they said to me, ‘Bishop, do not take us out. We are with the people. If they take shelter in the caves, we will accompany them. We share their lives and their fate, so please don’t take us out.’ That was the biggest lesson I learned as a bishop,” he said.

Sister Nyakuru said there was no hesitation among her religious colleagues. “If we run away, what kind of shepherds are we? The whole team of priests and sisters, along with Dr. Tom, decided to stay. For the people it was a great sign of hope. They knew they weren’t alone, that the church was with them,” she said.

The evacuation of so many foreign specialists, however, left the hospital in particular short of qualified staff. The evacuation flights were kept secret ahead of time to keep Khartoum from attacking the planes, and on the morning of June 16, 2011, several inexperienced Nuba nursing aides came to work at the hospital. They were informed that, in the absence of the foreign staff, they had been promoted to heads of departments. As those wounded by the bombings started arriving in droves, Sister Nyakuru and Catena instructed them in basic nursing skills. No one slept much for months.

In the years since, many of those aides went on to study nursing at a school in South Sudan run by Solidarity with South Sudan, and they’ve come home to the Nuba to assume responsibility for running much of the hospital. Sister Nyakuru said she is slowly working herself out of a job.

“This is the strategy of Comboni, to save Africa with Africans, to save the Nuba Mountains with Nuba, to empower local people so that they can run the show and you can move on,” she said. “We’re not quite there yet, but we’ve made progress in fulfilling the dream of Comboni. The church has grown deep roots among the Nuba people, all because we insisted on staying with the people during their difficult moments.”
Cinnamon is a spice obtained from the inner bark of several tree species from the genus Cinnamomum in plant family Lauraceae. There are a number of species which are often sold as cinnamon including, *C. tamale* (Indian Cinnamon), *C. verum* (Sri Lanka Cinnamon), *C. loureiroi* (Vietnamese cinnamon), *C. cassia* (Chinese Cinnamon), *C. burmannii* (Indonesian cinnamon), and *C. citriodorum* (Malabar Cinnamon). Cinnamon is used in both sweet and savoury foods as a special spice. The use of the plant in foods was so highly prized in the ancient times that it was only reserved as a special offer to the royals. This is probably because of its enormous health benefits including blood sugar control, weight loss, alertness, and cancer prevention among others. Fortunately, today the use of cinnamon is spread throughout the world. In Uganda, just like in most countries, cinnamon products are found all over most supermarkets thus making it highly accessible.

Cinnamon has been prized for its medicinal properties for thousands of years. Here, in this article, we take a look at some of the compelling health benefits of this wonder plant species.

Cinnamon has properties that help those with insulin resistance. In people with type 2 diabetes, regular taking of regulated quantity of cinnamon has great beneficial effects and also ability to reduce blood pressure. Cinnamon is a perfect weight reducer as it has the effect of thinning your blood thereby increasing blood circulation. Increased blood flow generally boosts your metabolism hence resulting in your weight loss. This blood thinning property of cinnamon also acts as an anti-clotting agent, beneficial especially for those suffering from heart diseases. Cinnamon can be used to prevent cancer in our body. For example, in its various forms, it has two chemical constituents called Cinnamaldehyde and Eugenol. These phytochemicals are effective in fighting human colon cancer cells. Cinnamon contains large quantities of highly potent polyphenol antioxidants. This further explains why this plant is very good in cancer prevention due to the fact that it reduces the formation of “free radicals” that cause cancer. In fact, the antioxidant level is so powerful that cinnamon can be used as a natural food preservative. Not only can Cinnamon contribute to the prevention of cancer, but also contains anti-inflammatory properties, which can ease swelling, help fight infections and repair tissue damage. Neurodegenerative diseases are characterized by progressive loss of the structure or function of brain cells. Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s disease are two of the most common types. Regular taking of cinnamon is crucial in preventing these diseases.

Cinnamaldehyde, the main active component of cinnamon, is important in fighting various kinds of microbial infections and this explains why it is effective in treating respiratory tract infections caused by fungi and in inhibiting growth of certain bacteria, including Listeria and Salmonella. The anti-bacterial properties of Cinnamon play a crucial role in getting rid of harmful bacteria without damaging your teeth or gums. It’s one of the reasons why Cinnamon oil is often used in chewing gums, mouthwashes, toothpaste and breath mints. Cinnamon oil is one of the major oils used in massage therapy due to its well-known body warming effects. It is highly effective in relaxing and relieving muscle pain. A few oil drops of Cinnamon can also be put in bath water to relax and to sooth tired and aching muscles. Considering all the benefits mentioned above, cinnamon is actually one of those “feel-good foods” that you ought to be looking out for!

Through suggestions coming from our survey with readers many ideas came forward for inclusion in the magazine. One of them was – ‘health tips.’ A healthy mind in a healthy body motivates us to include this simple but efficacious few lines on the great effect of cinnamon on our well-being. Happy reading! – Ed.
Choose a quiet place, free of noise; sit in the most comfortable position, light a candle if you wish and begin with a prayer.

Initial Prayer
Lord God,
Give me the grace to know the person of your Son Jesus, his vision and his mission so that I may commit myself entirely to him and your plan of Salvation.
Amen.

‘LECTIO DIVINA’

1. Read the Gospel of John 1:40-42; read the text slowly and listen attentively with the ‘ear of your heart’. What word, sentence or phrase stands out for you?
   Spend 2 mins of silence

2. Reflect: read the text again and pay attention to what touches you; why is it meaningful for you. What thought or reflection comes to you?
   Spend 2 mins of silence

3. Respond: read the text again but this time respond spontaneously to the word of God. In other words, begin a dialogue with God with what comes from within you. What gift does this text lead me to ask for from the Lord?
   Spend 2 mins of silence

4. Stay with the Word: read the text a final time and rest in the word. Allow God to speak to you in deep silence. Don’t say anything just listen to God’s words. What is He saying?
   Spend 5 mins of silence

5. Take now the sword, sentence or phase, into your daily life/activity; allow it to become part of you. Always listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it and rest on it as time allows during the day. Then allow the Word lead you to action.

Concluding your ‘Lectio Divina’ with the ‘Our Father’...

Reflection: the encounter of the two former disciples of John the Baptist with Jesus is an exploratory one, I say exploratory because they were eager to discover and know the person of Jesus, who he was, what was he like, where he lived etc., they only knew him by hearsay “there is the Lamb of God” (v29), meaning the “Servant of God” as told by the prophets. They really wanted to discover who Jesus really was. Jesus in return not only revealed himself to them but makes them his first disciples.

Central Message: “Andrew… was one of the two who heard what John had said and followed Jesus. Early next morning, he found his brother Simon and said to him, “we have found the Messiah” … and he brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said “You are Simon son of John, but you shall be called Cephas” (which means Rock).

Main points:

a) “Andrew… was one of the two who heard what John had said and followed Jesus” … (V40). Here Andrew is introduced by the Evangelist for the first time not only by name but also by his blood connection, he was “the brother of Simon”. Andrew, like many other Jews, learnt from the teaching of the prophets...
about the coming of the Messiah, especially from John. His hope to meet and see the Messiah was the expectation of so many in Israel and still is, the Messiah has not come for most of them yet. So Andrew was given the grace to meet Jesus the Son of God and to enter into deep relationship with him as he was invited to stay with him the day he met him. When Jesus invited Andrew to “come and see” his physical eyes, as well as the eyes of his faith, were wildly opened and thus his dream came true. “We have seen the Messiah”. That afternoon Andrew and the other disciple talked to him asking him many questions about him. In return He told them everything about him and vice versa. That was an unforgettable experience for both disciples and a turning point of their lives, they left everything and went after Jesus. They became Jesus’ first disciples.

b) Early next morning, he found his brother Simon and said to him, “we have found the Messiah… and he brought Simon to Jesus” … (v41-42). The experience of meeting Jesus burst in such explosive joy that Andrew could not contain for himself what he saw but had to share with others the impact that such a meeting made on him. So he went straight to his brother Simon to tell him of his discovery convincing him to “come and see” too, so that he could also have his own experience meeting the Messiah. Andrew then turned into a missionary of Jesus, although he is not implicitly sent, but he felt compelled to do that by the very fact of his experience meeting him. No one can remain static or passive after meeting Jesus, he burns hearts with fire of zeal and enthusiasm in order to speak of him of all that he does in us and through us. That is the model of Jesus’ discipleship: one who is called, who stays with him in order to know him and be sent to speak about him according to how one experience him.

c) “And brought Simon to Jesus” … Andrew did not force or drag Simon out to see the Messiah, No, it was Andrew’s sharing experience that moved Simon to a deep desire of seeing and knowing personally the Messiah. He wanted to see Him by his own eyes that he hurried up to meet the Lord. This last verse tells about one of the characteristics of the discipleship of Jesus, as we recall his very words: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mat 28:19). We may also have come to Jesus because of another person who spoke to us of him, our grandparents, our parents, a teacher, a priest, a nun, a friend, a mentor etc., for sure there has been someone up there who stirred our desire to meet the Son of God, Jesus our Saviour.

The conversation that Jesus had with Simon seemed to be very short but rich in meaning… Jesus looked at him and said “You are Simon son of John, but you shall be called Cephas” (which means Rock). When Jesus Looks at someone he first loves him/her for what s/he is, not for how s/he appears. He looks at Simon and loves him and then he changes his name giving him a new name which is a sign of a new a life, a new person, a new mission: the future support of the Christian community. Simon doesn’t know what it really means yet, he is too excited to think about it.

Some questions for our reflexion:

1. The name of the other disciple is not mentioned in the text, perhaps the intention of the author of the Gospel was to add your name instead, to be the companion of Andrew with a name? Could you try?
2. Andrew shared the joy of discovering Jesus in his life, how do you share the joy of the Gospel in your life?
3. Jesus comes and looks at you and loves you, what do you think he wants from you?
Dear Father John
Enclosed find one of my poems. I hope you can publish it for the Winter/Christmas edition of the magazine.

Thank You.
Tom Cairns,
Cardonald, Glasgow

The Holy Family
(by Tom Cairns)

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you,
Amen.”
The prayers of our childhood echo at this time.
Are we ready to move from first gear to fifth, as the Pontiff cries out?
‘Awake! Awake!’?
Come young and old, firm or slow movers.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph are waiting for you at the altar of love.
“Confidence! Confidence!” we shout as we raise our voices to paradise.
Yes, Jesus, Mary and Joseph await our petitions.
Send them your problems to the wonderland on high.
And I assure you your calls will be answered as God wills.
Fr Sean Dempsey, recently returned to the London Province after 11 wonderful years in Uganda, presents us with some of his reminiscences.

At the end of May I was assigned to Clontarf, Dublin. Until then I was working in Uganda for the past 10 years building up a new Mission, in Burunga, south west of Uganda. It was a daunting undertaking as the people are poor coming from other districts with little to sustain them but with your help and that of different organizations together with the Christian community we built 19 schools and 25 Churches, a hospital with a maternity ward and a secondary school. Our Christians supplied the stones, sand and bricks. However, it was through your generous offerings that we paid for the cement, iron sheets and labour etc. Thank you, as they say in their language ‘mwebale munonga’. We encouraged the poor to save the little money they have and help one another. We also built a bank for them. We encouraged family prayer, to trust in Jesus and fought witchcraft. Please God there will be many vocations from our Christian families.

I was sorry bidding them farewell as I worked together with them and their leaders listening to their advice and needs. I urged them to continue with the programme we started together and improve on it. On August 16th Burunga was handed over to the Diocese.

Back in Ireland I thank all who made me welcome, but it is not easy to acclimatise. The country is prospering with many people on bikes, many running and exercising and the roads with long lines of traffic. However many ignore the Sunday Mass and then in the referendum the majority voted for the abortion of the unborn child. Ireland has sent many sons and daughters as intrepid Missionaries to many parts of the world. Of course this has come from you the families across the country. Let our families once again hear the call of God and send fresh missionaries with the good news to the rest of the world. May God bless you all. Pray for me.

And Fr Sean adds a few comments on the Pope’s visit to Ireland.

Celebrating the Mass with Pope Francis in Phoenix Park, Sunday August 26th

The visit of Pope Francis to Ireland on the occasion of the WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2018 was a memorable occasion. He is the second Pope to come to our shores. Pope John Paul II’s visit in 1979 was welcomed with great enthusiasm. Pope Francis celebrated the Holy Mass in the Phoenix Park August 26th before a congregation of about two hundred thousand Pilgrims. I was privileged to be one of the celebrants. It did take time to get a ticket. On Sunday morning Ann the secretary of our Parish, Clontarf took Fr Larry the PP and myself to the nearest point of entry to the Park. However when we arrived there the Guard said we couldn’t continue for the rest of the way as it was out of bounds because the Pope would pass that way. Fr Larry in an engaging manner explained that I being an old man couldn’t make it on foot. He went to consult with his CO and after 10 minutes returned to say he would take us there by car. He left us near the altar. Old age has some benefits!

The crowds received Pope Francis with spontaneous applause and “cead mile failte” (“a hundred thousand welcomes” - Gaelic). The choir of 3000 added great joy to the occasion. The Mass was celebrated in Latin with a sprinkling of other languages. During the Penitential rite extensive time was given to begging God’s pardon for the abuse of children by Clerics and Religious. It made an impression on me. Our Pope as a pastoral person emphasised that we accept and forgive one another and help those in need. However, I felt that he should have stressed the sacredness of Christian marriage between a Christian man and woman After the Mass we walked the six kilometres back. I thought the event was subdued because of the abuse scandals that have been reported over the months. In the gospel of the Sunday Jesus explained that he would be with us in the consecrated Bread and Wine. John the Evangelist wrote that many of his followers couldn’t accept this and left Him and stopped going with Him.

There is so much to be done in Ireland and Europe to revive the Faith and bring Jesus into our families.
Remember Mary was also a refugee at Christmas

CHRISTMAS
Loving God,
On this Christmas Day we give thanks that Jesus, your Son, has come into our world. Bringing us gifts of peace and joy.
Bless us as we sit down together at this table for our Christmas meal.
Bless this food we share and help us to remember those who are hungry.
Be with our neighbours and our friends, all who are lonely, sick or away from home.
We pray that our departed loved ones may sit now at your table in heaven.
May the joy of this feast give us strength and light, now and in the days ahead.
AMEN

NEW YEAR
God of new beginnings,
as we reflect on this candle may it be a symbol of your eternal light and love.
On this New Year's Day we ask your blessing on all of us who gather round this table and on the food we are about to share.
Just as we are nourished by this food may we also know the nourishment of Jesus, the Bread of Life.
In the year ahead may the love of God enfold us, in good days and bad, in our struggles and in our joys, may the light of Jesus lead us forward in hope.
AMEN

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