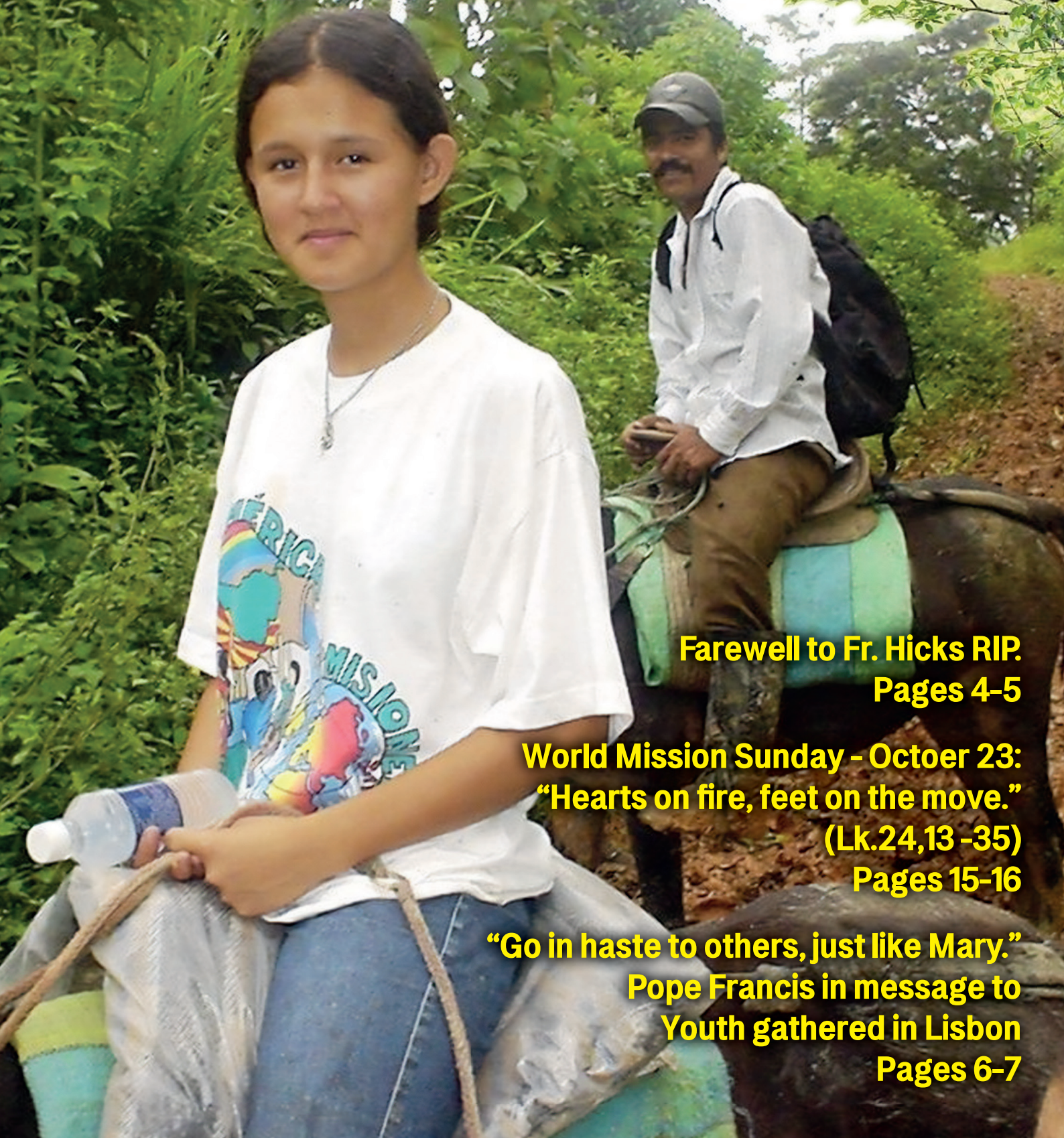


COMBONI MISSION

Autumn 2023



Farewell to Fr. Hicks RIP.
Pages 4-5

World Mission Sunday - October 23:
"Hearts on fire, feet on the move."
(Lk.24,13-35)
Pages 15-16

"Go in haste to others, just like Mary."
Pope Francis in message to
Youth gathered in Lisbon
Pages 6-7

COMBONI MISSION

Autumn 2023

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From the Editor

Signs of Hope

Our Autumn edition of 'Comboni Mission' appears in these months to celebrate several commemorative events. As the Universal Church we honour the primary task of mission work and the spreading of the Gospel. The Holy Father presents us with a message for us to take up and implement in our lives:

"I desire to express my closeness in Christ to all the men and women missionaries in the world, especially to those enduring any kind of hardship. Dear friends, the Risen Lord is always with you. He sees your generosity and the sacrifices you are making for the mission of evangelization in distant lands. Not every day of our lives is serene and unclouded, but let us never forget the words of the Lord Jesus to his friends before his Passion: "In the world you will have tribulations, but be courageous: I have conquered the world!" (Jn 16:33)."

It is with these heartwarming and encouraging words that the Pope Francis encourages and strengthens all missionaries. As we celebrate Mission Sunday Day let us re-echo his words and inspire our missionaries in difficult and hazardous situations throughout the world through our prayer and sacrifice. We

are able to reflect further the Pope's message on pages 14-15!

Also, we were encouraged by the World Youth Day in Lisbon in August which brought together over one and a half million young catholic pilgrims. Their enthusiasm and fervour struck a chord in the hearts of all who witnessed such a magnificent gathering. The Holy Father encourages them to welcome ALL into the Church as they chanted in response to his plea in a loud and clear voice "All, All, All" "Todos, Todos, Todos". A sure sign of hope for the Church!

As we enter into the Month of November we honour our deceased relatives, friends and all our benefactors as we pray for the Holy Souls. It is a time-honoured chapter in the Catholic Church and we wish to share our prayers and Masses with all our friends and benefactors in our offering the sacrifice of the Holy Mass for the repose of their souls.

On the 23rd of August in Sunningdale we celebrated the funeral Mass of Fr. Robert Hicks and to him we dedicate a sincerely felt obituary in his memory on pages 4-5.

To him and all our deceased "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord".



Fr. Hicks' funeral Mass at Sunningdale

COMBONI MISSION ISBN 0962-7154 is a quarterly publication of the Comboni Missionaries (also known as the Verona Fathers), a Catholic Missionary Institute for the evangelisation of peoples, issued free to their friends and supporters.

Cover Photo: Comboni Press

Current issue: Autumn 2023

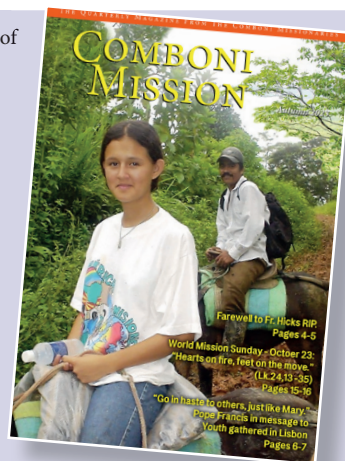
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Designed and Printed by Artworks, Dalkey, Co. Dublin.

Telephone: 00 353 1 275 1707.

Our thanks to contributors whose photographs and letters we have used.



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Getting to know the *Comboni* *Missionaries*



Fr. Robert David Hicks mccj RIP Belfast (Northern Ireland)

June 30th 1938 – Sunningdale July 24th 2023

Father Robert ('Bob') was born the eldest of six brothers, to parents Robert David and Lily (Elizabeth), in a working-class area of West Belfast. He was to do his secondary schooling at St. Malachy's College in Belfast under the Christian Brothers. He was always proud of his association with the Christian Brothers and spoke highly of them. A fervent altar server at the nearby 'Clonard Monastery' run by the Redemptorists, Bob soon found his vocation in life by applying to enter our House of Studies and Novitiate here at Sunningdale. He made his 'First Vows' on the Feast of St. Peter Claver on September 9th 1957. One of our Irish priests, Fr. Seán Dempsey, remembers Fr. Hicks from that time: "I met Fr. Bob for the first time when he entered the Novitiate at Sunningdale in 1955. Our Novice Master was Fr. Di Negri. We remained friends for the rest of our lives. He was energetic, young and participated fully in all the activities of the Community. He came from a patriotic family that campaigned for a united Ireland. His family, as all families at the time, suffered much through the long troubles. Because of this upbringing and early experience, he was always a great advocate for the cause of justice and the rights of all peoples to self-determination. Although he had an excellent education in Belfast, he would have loved to learn and speak Irish. I tried to help him with the little I had learned in Primary School in Tullamore".

Bob remained in Sunningdale until 1959 when he moved to Northern Italy for his Theological Studies where he excelled in his studies and graduated 'Summa cum Laude' with a 'Licenciante in Sacred Theol-



Father Robert Hicks RIP

ogy' from the University of Milan.

Completing his studies, he proceeded to be ordained a Priest in Milan Cathedral, on his twenty-sixth birthday, on June 30th 1964 at the hands of Archbishop Piero Aghajanian, the Prefect of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. It was a wonderful day with his parents, brothers and relatives present. He was very proud of the fact that the number of Priestly Ordinations that year, fifty-eight in total, was the largest group ever in the history of our Institute!

For the first two years of ministry, Fr. Bob worked as a 'Vocation Promoter' and 'Director' of our Missionary Magazine. During this time he was active in travelling to primary schools up and down the country, recruiting several candidates

amongst whom were Fr. Bernard Lennon and the late Fr. Paul Felix. He was instrumental in giving new impulse to the magazine and the tradition continues today. Before leaving for Uganda, he spent three years as Vice-Rector in our then Junior Seminary in Mirfield, West Yorkshire.

From 1969 - 1972 Father Bob ministered among the Lango Peoples of Northern Uganda in the Diocese of Lira, working in parish ministry and in his spare time editing a monthly Diocesan Newspaper that he had founded at the behest of the Local Bishop, Caesar Asili. Returning from Uganda he was appointed Rector of the Junior Seminary at Mirfield and was to remain there for the next four years. I was with him on the Staff as Vice-Rector. I have very happy memories of that time! Some of us in the evening at the end of a hard day teaching and looking after the seminarians, would gather in Fr. Bob's room sharing a mug of 'Horlicks', and occasionally something stronger, and listening to his collection of Irish music notably the 'Dubliners' and 'The Wolf Tones'.

My successor as Vice-Rector in the Junior Seminary was Fr. John Clark who recalls a more serious side to Fr. Bob: "I had the great privilege to have worked with him in the Junior Seminary in the mid-Seventies. I found him to be an exemplary Rector and a born teacher. The students loved him and quickly perceived his utter dedication to them. He truly had a way with them. As a newly-trained teacher myself, I realised I was working with someone who understood young people. He was so easy to work with. His grasp of politics was acute. I could not help but be fascinated by the fact that he



Ordination of Father Robert Hicks, June 30, 1964

would avidly listen to the news and read the daily newspaper. He would always play a lively part in discussions and debates: he had a quick intellect and would speak his mind, but would always take the trouble to seek out the others' opinions ... unusually for someone of his great intellect he was always very practical and down-to-earth".

From 1975-1981 Father Bob served as Provincial of the London Province where he served with wisdom and dedication. At the end of which he took up a mission appointment in Brazil where he remained from 1982 - 1990. After a short period of language study in Sao Paulo he moved to our Parish in the town of 'Ouro Preto do Oeste' in the State of Rondônia. Fr. John Clark remembers his time in that region as he worked close by:

"Fr. Bob first worked in the Parish of Our Lady of Aparecida in the town of 'Ouro Preto'. The people were fond of his down-to-earth, simple but profound sermons, talks and retreats. I remember a

parishioner telling me that Fr. Hicks was one of the kindest and most obliging Comboni Missionaries she had ever met. Father Bob then became the Pastoral Coordinator, and later Vicar-General, of the Diocese of Sao Mateus in the State of Espirito Santo. He was very loyal to his Bishop, fellow Comboni Missionary Dom Aldo Gerna, and when the bishop's life was threatened by local wealthy land-owners, Fr. Bob moved in to the Bishop's house and stayed with him until the threat had passed. Personally speaking, Father Bob was a great and dear friend of mine. He was a very talented yet humble man whose faith meant everything to him as a Son of the Sacred Heart of Jesus".

After his return from Brazil in 1990, Fr. Bob worked in the field of Missionary Animation but was then again elected Provincial Superior from 1992 - 1998. He was always keen to keep the London Province as a collaborative part of the Congregation and support our Missions and Missionaries abroad. With the excep-

tion of several years between our Communities in Central London, Leeds and Dublin, Fr. Bob happily spent his time in Sunningdale where he had begun his missionary life back in 1955. Besides being Superior and Provincial Bursar, he loved to spend his afternoons keeping the gardens tidy and especially in mowing the lawns.

Fr. Bob was equally at home in the London Province as abroad, and in particular in the Community of Sunningdale where he spent the last twenty-six years of his life: admired and loved by the Faithful frequenting the Sacred Heart Church. It was therefore fitting that he was to die peacefully in his room early in the morning of July 24th 2023.

We are very thankful to God for Fr. Robert's call to the Missionary Priesthood, and for his many years of active ministry in pastoral work, in the London Province, Uganda and Brazil; in the field of education; in supporting the work of our Missions and Missionaries abroad; and in the service of leadership in our Congregation. In his lifetime he was never what one might describe as a 'pious soul' but in his last years he was exemplary in his dedication to the 'Divine Office'; to his assiduous reading of the Sacred Scriptures; and to the faithful celebration of the Mass. Although retired from public ministry in his last years due to memory loss, Fr. Bob was always available to hearing the confession of anyone who called to the door.

To his Family in Belfast, Bob was always a loving son, brother and uncle. To the Comboni Family, he was always the wise and beloved Confrère. To the Faithful, he was an exemplary Priest and Missionary. To many others he was simply a friend: admired and loved for his gracious and polite ways, and enriching all with his Belfast wit and charm. He was a man Confrères and the laity looked up to and respected.

Father Robert has left a legacy of great faith and dedication to the Gospel. We thank him God for the rich legacy that he has left behind and which we would wish to live out in our own daily lives. He will be missed but with Christian faith we pray: May he rest in peace and joy and light, and rise in God's glory.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

WORLD YOUTH DAY

Lisbon 2023- a Diary of events



by *Pauline Watts, Sacred Heart Church, Sunningdale*

Nothing could have fully prepared me for the experience that was WYD. And why would I ever consider myself a candidate for this trip? At this point in my life, I firmly believed that that ship had long since sailed. But travelling with our diocese (Arundel and Brighton) as a Group Leader gave me that unexpected and amazing opportunity. It was like a gift being presented before me - and I grabbed it with both hands!

The Opening Mass was incredible; I've never seen so many people altogether in one place. And I have to admit that it was a bit overwhelming at first: but then I



Luis, a fellow pilgrim, from Sacred Heart Church, Sunningdale, with Pauline.

quickly realised I was part of an outpouring of joy and celebration amongst the 2 million pilgrims who descended upon Lisbon. Everybody heading in the same direction, whether it be to listen to Bishop Barron speak at one of the daily Rise Up encounters or to one of the many activities aimed at celebrating our Faith with music, dance or in quiet contemplation.

The Holy Father's arrival was greeted with wild excitement, genuine happiness and joy. To be in his presence was awesome. There was something in the air. A young person said to me it was like Glastonbury x 20 and frankly I've never seen such excitement. Bigger than any rock star, Pope Francis greeted the crowds warmly and with humility. Some of our group managed to get close to where he was passing and they could hardly believe it. They felt that he was looking directly at them - such is the power and charisma of the man; he could make an audience of such size feel like they were being addressed individually.

The Pope's theme was "Mary arose and went with haste" (Lk,1:39). The Madonna, Pope Francis explains in his message for the young pilgrims, is the "model of the youth in movement, not still in front of the mirror to contemplate their own image or trapped in the nets." She is all outward looking.

All of his talks and homilies spoke directly to the hearts of these young people - and equally to the not so young. How is



it possible to feel like an individual with 2 million other people around you? His message to the young people was clear: they were to shine, to listen and to not be afraid, and he repeated this several times giving examples. A simple message but very profound within the parameters of today's society.

We are all still digesting and processing what the week meant to us each individually. What the young pilgrims expressed to



Fatima Trip, Arundel & Brighton Diocese and Portsmouth Diocese from UK.

me was that the week had enabled them to:

- Forge new links and supportive friendships and made them open and eager to do more encounters like this together e.g., Ampleforth Abbey Youth Festival. Fraternity in their faith.
- Develop new insights into their faith during small group discussions contemplating the Pope's messages. What it means to them in their lives.
- Learn from each other ... "and I hope I was able to leave a positive mark likewise on your life just as you did on me" was something I heard a lot.
- Discover that faith can be fun, happy, joyous – and so can the clergy
- Re-energise and enable them to be more confident to deal with life's challenges.

Some of the young people had been sponsored and partly funded by various parishes and that was really positive for those who otherwise would not have been able to fund the pilgrimage.

And for me personally it was a privilege to be around these young people and to accompany them. I have been a teacher all my life and I love being with young people, they inspire and energise me. On this occasion, their faith inspired me enormously. Over the week, I felt a gradual and slow deep awareness that the Lord was present there and then in my life. Not like the lightning bolt when I decided to become a Catholic, but still very affirmative: a slow burn. But it was a trip not without its challenges – lots of walking around the very busy city trying to stay together on our travels, never less than 20,000 steps a

day on cobbled paths, leading a large group on a day trip to Fatima, lots of very late nights, incredible heat at 37 degrees. But I loved every minute of it! And as I sit at home writing this, I am missing it enormously.

Possibly the Pope's message that resonated most was this one. "You are not here by chance. May these be days in which we engrave in our hearts that we are loved as we are. Not as we would like to be, but as we are now. This is the starting point of WYD, but above all the starting point of life," the Pontiff said. "Friends, if God calls you by name, it means that none of us are a number to God." God sees us all as individuals – what a reassuring message.

And the Pope's final words to the young

can inspire us all on our journey of faith.

"Dear young people, I would like to look into the eyes of each of you and say: Do not be afraid. I will tell you something else, also very beautiful: it is no longer I, but Jesus himself who is now looking at you. He knows each of your hearts, each of your lives; he knows your joys, your sorrows, your successes and failures. He knows your heart. Today, he says to you, here in Lisbon, at this World Youth Day: "Have no fear, take heart, do not be afraid!"

I know no-one who was not deeply moved by the days we spent in Lisbon. Refreshed in their faith. Resolved to carry on life's journey according to God's calling.



Mass at the 'Rise Up' Encounters

MEXICO

The Priest who Challenges the Narcos with the News

Being both a priest and a journalist represents the two most dangerous missions ever. This is the experience of Father Omar Sotelo Aguilar, an energetic Mexican priest of the Society of San Paolo who for years has been at the forefront of reporting on the criminal system that entraps his country.



In Mexico, last year alone, fourteen journalists have, while in the last decade as many as thirty religious, lost their lives because of their commitment to working alongside the people. But 'information can help change things'. Father Omar has

always been convinced of this, ever since, as a boy, he felt this 'double vocation' for the first time. He says: "Since I loved playing soccer, a priest from the diocesan seminary of Mexico City invited me to participate in a tournament. By mistake,

however, I ended up at the Pauline seminary and there, as well as the enormous football pitch, I was struck by the printing press run by priests: the congregation founded by Don Giacomo Alberione in fact has the mission of spreading the message of Jesus precisely through the means of social communication".

Everything else came as a consequence of that meeting: young Omar began his training to become a priest, while in him the fascination for what he calls 'the art of journalism', especially investigative, grew. Newly ordained, he began working with the Mexican episcopal conference for which he helped set up the Multimedia Catholic Centre: "Originally it was a project to unite the communication efforts of over one hundred Mexican dioceses – he says – but soon we began to aggregate a group of independent professionals with the aim of working on the hottest topics of current events".

Today, the Centre of which Father Sotelo Aguilar is the director, represents a point of reference at a national level – and



Father Joaquín Mora and Father Javier Campos were murdered on June 20, 2022.
(Photo: Aid to the Church in Need)



Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Mexican armed forces during operations in north eastern Mexico. Photo: 123rf

beyond – on reporting information, in particular of the violence against ecclesial operators. His role has also been confirmed by important awards, such as the National Journalism Award for the ‘Human Rights’ section thanks to an investigation into the ‘Tragedy of the priesthood in Mexico.’

Father Omar says: “In recent years we have carried out various journalistic projects, also through videos or short films, to denounce what is wrong in Mexico. For example, we produced a series of thirteen documentaries entitled ‘Hermano narco’ (‘Brother narco’) with the aim of giving a

voice to witnesses who have unfortunately fallen into the trap of organized crime, to demonstrate that responding to violence with more violence only multiplies suffering. The only way to change things is to draw on one of the most proper qualities of the human being, and that is the ability to forgive; forgiveness is not only a religious concept, but it is the only human feeling that can break the barriers of hate. So, with our work, we have tried to get this message across to those men and women whose lives have been turned upside down by crime, to try to rehumanize what had been dehumanized”.

The Pauline priest insists that using language “that touches the experience of both the victims and the perpetrators can transform the context. Here, this is precisely our task: to have an impact on people’s lives, on public opinion, on society. Then, of course, our commitment also focuses on denouncing attacks on the Church, given that in the last decade Mexico has confirmed itself as one of the most dangerous countries for religious. In the period of Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s government alone, i.e., just over four years, we have already had seven priests murdered, in addition to another eight who survived attacks”.

But why such fury against the Catholic Church? “The Church in Mexico has often been attacked since the times of the ‘cristera’ war of 1929 when attempts were made to eliminate it from the national territory. Today we are not faced with real persecution, yet the situation is in some ways more dangerous than a hundred years ago because religious are targeted to sow a culture of death, terror, and corruption in society. Let me explain: in Mexico, when a priest is assassinated, it affects not just a person but an entire community, in the midst of which he acts as a social stabilizer. In fact, religious do not only provide a pastoral and spiritual service but also work in education, the protection of health and the protection of human rights. Just think of the enormous work alongside the masses of desperate people who



Mexico City. The Supreme Court building. Photo: Thelmadatter



On the evening of 26 September 2014, a group of 43 Mexican students disappeared in south-western Guerrero state. "There are more than 100,000 disappeared and 350,000 victims due to organized crime". Photo: File Swm

reach Mexico from Central America seeking the mirage of the United States and who very often end up in the mesh of organized crime. Here, when a priest is eliminated, society is destabilized".

Father Omar recognizes that in many parts of the country, there is now a narcoculture, a narcoeconomy and even a narcogovernment; organized crime has managed to infiltrate organizations such as the army, the navy and even federal and state governments. And he gives an example: "The former Mexican Secretary of Public Security, Genaro Garcia Luna, is currently detained in the United States for conspiracy to drug trafficking; he allegedly re-

ceived millions of dollars in bribes from the Sinaloa cartel of 'Chapo' Guzmán. There are governors, deputies and ministers linked to crime and those who denounce this anomaly, which directly impacts the country's progress, ending up in the crosshairs. Last year there were more than 850 death threats against priests, and I personally know many journalists who have suffered these same attacks".

But often the perpetrators of assaults and murders are not found. The priest says: "There are several factors. On the one hand, there is so much violence – more than 100,000 disappeared and 350,000 victims due to organized crime –

that public security institutions cannot keep up. Obviously then there is also the political aspect: I am only mentioning the case of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, the archbishop of Guadalajara assassinated in 1993 by the will of the Tijuana cartel for his inexhaustible fight against drug trafficking. A cardinal was killed in an international airport, and thirty years later we have not a single culprit detained for this crime! A monument to impunity. And so, in 80% of cases, the investigations into the murders of priests have led nowhere. The scene is one in which the inability and lack of preparation of the security forces are all too evident".

Regarding the reason why the perpetrators of assaults and murders are not found, Father Omar, who was repeatedly threatened with death says: There are several factors: "Everyone is exposed to violence in some way; every Mexican is afraid. However, we who are engaged in communication and evangelization have the obligation and the privilege to continue to announce and denounce. It's true, we do expose ourselves to danger, but someone has to do it, right? And I love what I do. Organized crime tries to keep us silent and to trap us in the culture of silence; we must be the voice – as the prophet says – that cries out in the desert, influencing public opinion to change things. Mexico is a beautiful place, and it doesn't deserve what it's going through".



Mexico City. The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "When a priest is assassinated, it affects not just a person but an entire community". Photo File Swm

Human Life And The Cost Of War



Fr. John Clark

For the peaceful lovers of life there is very little in today's world appearing to show that the violence of war is coming to a quick end. Our world belongs to the one who can give it lasting justice and peace. To many of us this seems very wishful thinking as seen against the backdrop of what is currently happening especially in Ukraine and elsewhere.

It is impossible to describe the many hardships and untold sufferings people have to face as they witness the destruction of nature and the environment due to the sophisticated weaponry used in military combat by air, land and sea. At the same time, as offspring creatures of God our creator, we must emphasize the sacredness and preciousness of all forms of life that exist on the face of this planet, from the moments of their conception, birth, life and death. We can feel so indignant at the loss of any form of young life that is violently destroyed as such an early stage. The amount of total dedication, love and commitment given in so many ways by parents, grandparents, other fam-

ily members, educators, personal friends can be so unbelievable. To reach certain levels of maturity calls for much dedication, strong motivation, patience and perseverance.

To procreate and foster human life can be such a miraculous adventure. On the other hand, we witness the senseless destruction of lives and buildings. It is becoming so difficult to shut out the soaring costs of war. Human lives utterly wiped out. We may just think of the multiple physical and mental damages wars cause. The loss of one's family, friends and home, for millions of refugees, always crossing borders and never coming home. To lose one's home and country, what can there be left in life for such people?

Will humankind never learn from the past? History seems to repeat itself so often, doesn't? All that dissipated energy and relentless effort needed to wage war and battle on defeats imagination. Cliches abound: Violence breeds violence. No-

body gains in war. There are no winners only losers in war. And so on.

Isaiah the prophet, chapter 11, verse 6, paints a picture out of this world:

"THE WOLF SHALL DWELL WITH THE LAMB, AND THE LEOPARD SHALL LIE DOWN WITH THE YOUNG GOAT, AND THE CALF AND THE LION AND THE FATTENED CALF TOGETHER; AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

It seems like utopia, an ideal perfect society, a world beyond our dreams. With that same hope and spirit of Pope Francis, I too believe we human beings do have the God-given sense to save the planet from peril and from woe. It is going to be hard work to follow the leadership of that little child and block out the war cries of megalomaniac warlords who advocate violence and destruction.



by Harvey Martin

OUR PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

In May 2023 we went on Pilgrimage with 40 other pilgrims from the UK, to BETHLEHEM, JERUSALEM and JORDAN with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

We went as Pilgrims and celebrated Mass at a different holy site each day with readings pertinent to that site.

In Bethlehem, which means 'House of The Bread', we celebrated our first Holy Mass in St Catherine's Church which is attached to the Basilica of The Nativity in Bethlehem. The Franciscans built this Neo-Gothic style church in 1882 to enable Catholics to celebrate Holy Mass as close to the tiny Chapel of the Manger as possible. The Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox occupy most of this Basilica, thus the need for St Catherine's Church. After Mass we had a tour of The Church of The Nativity which is built over the cave in which Jesus was born; it has had a major renovation in recent years and we were able to see the magnificent mosaic of an angel which had been covered with plaster for many centuries.

Within this system of caves is the cave used by St Jerome in the fourth century and in which he completed his translation of the Bible into Latin, the Vulgate.

The second day we visited Shepherd's Chapel which is built in the shape of a tent, with an altar "Where Heaven touched Earth" and where we sang the beautiful carol "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night". That evening we were welcomed by Fr Bernard Poggi the Rector of the Patriarchal Seminary in Beit Jala a



village near Bethlehem. After singing in their lovely Chapel, we joined 14 young enthusiastic seminarians in a meal together.

The following day we drove to Jerusalem which means City of Peace. This city draws us back time and time again: Salem being an Arabic greeting meaning 'Peace be upon you'. There we stayed in the Christian Quarter of the old part of the city and in walking distance to the Basilica of The Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

We first paid our respects to the representative of The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Bishop Shomali, and then we celebrated Holy Mass in the Co-Cathedral of Jerusalem. The Cathedral of Jerusalem is The Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. However, it is also the Cathedral for the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Church - we all share the same holy sites being the Crucifixion Site on Calvary and the Tomb of Jesus; the Co-Cathedral being for the use of the Roman Catholic rites.

During the next two days we visited The Cenacle on Mt Zion - the place of The Last Supper - and St Peter in Gallicantu - this church is dedicated to The Denial of Christ. Here we visited the house of Caiaphas where Jesus had a religious trial and was held overnight in a very deep pit before being presented to Pilate the following day. We also went through the Kidron Valley and Mount of Olives to the Chapel of Dominus Flevit Church (JESUS wept) with its magnificent view overlooking Jerusalem. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we marveled at the magnificent ancient olive trees. We celebrated Mass in the Basilica of The Agony with its beautiful large stained-glass windows in colours of purple, black, white and gold, giving an ambience of mourning as one enters the church. In front of the High Altar is a large rock where Jesus is said to have prayed before his arrest - the Holy Rock of Agony.

One evening we had a solemn entry into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the Franciscans singing the Te Deum as we processed to the Holy Sepulchre. We entered The Burial Tomb and venerated at the slab on which Jesus had been placed. On our final afternoon we prayed the Stations of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa experiencing much jostling from the public passing by. Before we left for Jordan, we attended Mass on Calvary within the Basilica and were able to pray at Calvary for a short while.

"We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you; because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."



Mass being celebrated in Basilica of The Agony.

After an hour's drive from Jerusalem and two hours at passport control, we crossed the Jordan River into Jordan with the outside temperature being 28 deg C.

The Jordan Valley is known as the Bread Basket of Jordan and the Baptismal Site in the River Jordan where St John the Baptist baptized Jesus is the third holiest site in Christendom.

'You are my son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

Here we renewed our Baptismal vows and stood in the waters of the river Jordan.

Before arriving at the Rosary Sisters' Visitation House in Amman, we travelled to Mt Nebo and celebrated Mass in the Transfiguration Chapel. As I stood on the crest of Mt Nebo, I tried to imagine how Moses at the age of 120 years old must have felt after wandering through the desert for 40 years at last seeing The Promised Land in the distance, but knowing that through his own disobedience, he would not be setting foot there.

For the next five days in Jordan, we visited the local Christian people in their schools, churches and refugee places. (It is inter-



Kitty & friends in Jordan

esting to note that the Comboni Sisters have been running a hospital in the province of Karak since 1935 attending to the poorest people, especially refugees.)

In Amman we had Mass in the church of The Good Shepherd and visited Our Lady of Peace Centre which offers free medical and psychological care for people with disabilities in Jordan, and provides for various pastoral and youth activities for these vulnerable people. The beautiful mosaic behind the main altar shows St Daniel Comboni and a Comboni Sister standing amongst other saints of the Church.



Kitty & Anthony rest at Mt. Nebo

We visited a parish where we had a wonderful evening socializing with the members of the Jordanian Christian Youth Movement.

We visited two Latin Patriarchal schools outside of Amman, joining children in their classes and in the play grounds, talking with students and teachers. For Mass that day we went to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Mountains in Anjara in the hills of Gilead - often mentioned in the Bible. Here in May 2010, the statue of Our Lady of the Mount shed tears of blood which was witnessed by many. This Shrine has now become part of a holy route in Jordan, visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

On our final day in Jordan, we visited the Latin Vicariate of Jordan to pay our respects. We then visited the Rafedin Iraqi Refugee Project, started in March 2016, helping Iraqi men and women and their families who fled from ISIS. The women are trained as seamstresses by fashion designers from Italy, and the men are trained in the culinary field.

Everywhere we went we listened to the stories of the local Christians and what they endure living in Palestine and Jordan. We realize how blessed we are to have the freedom of religion and choice in our country.

We continue to pray for The Living Stones that they get peace with justice.

An excerpt from the

Message Of His Holiness Pope Francis

for World Mission Day (Sunday October 22, 2023)

Hearts on fire, feet on the move (cf. Lk 24:13-35)

Dear brothers and sisters!

For this year's World Mission Sunday, I have chosen a theme inspired by the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 24:13-35): "Hearts on fire, feet on the move". Those two disciples were confused and dismayed, but their encounter with Christ in the word and in the breaking of the bread sparked in them the enthusiastic desire to set out again towards Jerusalem and proclaim that the Lord had truly risen. In the Gospel account, we perceive this change in the disciples through a few revealing images: their hearts burned within them as they heard the

Scriptures explained by Jesus, their eyes were opened as they recognized him and, ultimately, their feet set out on the way. By meditating on these three images, which reflect the journey of all missionary disciples, we can renew our zeal for evangelization in today's world.

1. Our hearts burned within us "when he explained the Scriptures to us". In missionary activity, the word of God illumines and transforms hearts.

On the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the hearts of the two disciples were down-

cast, as shown by their dejected faces, because of the death of Jesus, in whom they had believed (cf. v. 17). Faced with the failure of the crucified Master, their hopes that he was the Messiah collapsed (cf. v. 21).

Then, "as they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them" (v. 15). As when he first called the disciples, so now, amid their bewilderment, the Lord takes the initiative; he approaches them and walks alongside them. So too, in his great mercy, he never tires of being with us, despite all our failings, doubts, weaknesses, and the dismay and pessimism that make us become "fool-



Pope Francis at an audience with pilgrims

ish and slow of heart” (v. 25), men and women of little faith.

Today, as then, the Risen Lord remains close to his missionary disciples and walks beside them, particularly when they feel disoriented, discouraged, fearful of the mystery of iniquity that surrounds them and seeks to overwhelm them. So, “let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!” (Evangelii Gaudium, 86). The Lord is greater than all our problems, above all if we encounter them in our mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. For in the end, this mission is his and we are nothing more than his humble co-workers, “useless servants” (cf. Lk 17:10).

I desire to express my closeness in Christ to all the men and women missionaries in the world, especially to those enduring any kind of hardship. Dear friends, the Risen Lord is always with you. He sees your generosity and the sacrifices you are making for the mission of evangelization in distant lands. Not every day of our lives is serene and unclouded, but let us never forget the words of the Lord Jesus to his friends before his Passion: “In the world you will have tribulations, but be courageous: I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16:33).

After listening to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the risen Jesus, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lk 24:27). The hearts of the disciples thrilled, as they later confided to each other: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” (v. 32). Jesus is himself the living Word, who alone can make our hearts burn within us, as he enlightens and transforms them.

In this way, we can better understand Saint Jerome’s dictum that “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (Commentary on Isaiah, Prologue). “Without the Lord to introduce us, it is impossible to understand sacred Scripture in depth; yet the opposite is equally true: without sacred Scripture, the events of Jesus’ mission and of his Church in the world remain indecipherable” (Aperuit Illis, 1). It follows that knowledge of Scripture is important for the Christian life, and even more so for the preaching of Christ and his Gospel. Otherwise, what are you passing on to others if not your own ideas and projects? A cold heart can never make other hearts burn!

So let us always be willing to let ourselves be accompanied by the Risen Lord as he explains to us the meaning of the Scrip-



A moment of Eucharistic Adoration

tures. May he make our hearts burn within us; may he enlighten and transform us, so that we can proclaim his mystery of salvation to the world with the power and wisdom that come from his Spirit.

2. Our eyes were “opened and recognized him” in the breaking of the bread. Jesus in the Eucharist is the source and summit of the mission.

The fact that their hearts burned for the word of God prompted the disciples of Emmaus to ask the mysterious Wayfarer to stay with them as evening drew near. When they gathered around the table, their eyes were opened and they recognized him when he broke the bread. The decisive element that opened the eyes of the disciples was the sequence of actions performed by Jesus: he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. Those were the usual gestures of the head of a Jewish household, but, performed by Jesus Christ with the grace of the Holy Spirit, they renewed for his two table companions the sign of the multiplication of the loaves and above all that of the Eucharist, the sacrament of the sacrifice of the cross. Yet at the very moment when they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, “he vanished from their sight” (Lk 24:31). Here we can recognize an essential reality of our faith: Christ, who breaks the bread, now becomes the bread broken, shared with the disciples and

consumed by them. He is seen no longer, for now he has entered the hearts of the disciples, to make them burn all the more, and this prompts them to set out immediately to share with everyone their unique experience of meeting the Risen Lord. The risen Christ, then, is both the one who breaks the bread and, at the same time, the bread itself, broken for us. It follows that every missionary disciple is called to become, like Jesus and in him, through the working of the Holy Spirit, one who breaks the bread and one who is broken bread for the world.

Here it should be remembered that breaking our material bread with the hungry in the name of Christ is already a work of Christian mission. How much more so is the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, which is Christ himself, a work of mission par excellence, since the Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church.

As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out: “We cannot keep to ourselves the love we celebrate in the Sacrament [of the Eucharist]. By its very nature, it asks to be communicated to everyone. What the world needs is the love of God, to encounter Christ and believe in him. For this reason the Eucharist is not only the source and summit of the life of the Church; it is also the source and summit of her mission: ‘An authentically Eucharistic Church is a missionary Church’” (Sacramentum Caritatis, 84).

Golden Jubilee

Celebration of Fr. John Clark, mccj

*Fr. John Clark
Comboni Missionary
(Verona Father)*



*50th Anniversary of
Ordination*

Regular readers of Comboni Mission magazine will have read many contributions from Fr. John Clark over the years.

On Saturday 29th April he celebrated his golden jubilee of priestly ordination in St. Joachim's church Carmyle, Glasgow, where the Comboni community is based. John was joined by family members, members of the Comboni community, many friends and a number of local clergy who have benefited from Fr. John's support over the years. Dermot Lamb a former seminarian companion preached the homily.

The concelebrated Mass, scripture readings from Isaiah and from the Gospel of St Luke highlighted the theme of mission, the fifty strong deanery choir and the large congregation added to the joyful atmosphere.



The moment of the Homily

Fr. John was ordained in his home parish in Sunderland on 28th April 1973, but his journey to the priesthood started in 1959 when he was inspired by a visiting Verona Father and entered the junior seminary in Yorkshire. The following

years of study confirmed the choice he had made and the deep lifelong conviction shared with the prophet Isaiah of "being sent to bring good news to the poor, healing to the broken hearted, liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison."



John's ordination 28/04/73



Concelebrating Mass

The founder of the Comboni Missionaries St. Daniel Comboni wrote: "I want holy and capable missionaries daring and generous, capable of suffering and death, they need to be inflamed with the love that springs up from God and Christ's heart".

Fr. John's commitment to his ministry has always been evident and he sought out situations where he could serve and he had a long term commitment to the Catholic community in Ballymurphy Belfast, and alongside the people, faced many difficult situations. Fr. John served in several Comboni communities here in the UK but like all missionaries the place they want to be is where they feel the greatest need is and where they can be of greatest service; for Fr. John, that has been his years with the indigenous people in Brazil. Pope Francis says "The Church was born in the margins of the cross where so many of the crucified are found who are on the periphery, whose voices are seldom heard, whose voices are muted, who are the enslaved and indebted ones. These were the situations where Fr. John found himself and the people that he served. His co-worker Fr. Ezekiel Ramin, serving alongside him in Amazonia, was ambushed and shot because of his commitment to justice and the poor. Fr. Ezekiel, preaching a few months before his murder said: "I love you and I love justice. Let us not condone violence, even if we are treated violently. I myself have received death threats, if my life is for you, my death will be too."

Fr. John took the opportunity of his jubilee celebration to acknowledge the outstanding service, over many years, of a

group who support the Comboni Missionaries in Scotland. These dedicated people have raised several thousands of pounds promoting sales of the Comboni Missionary calendar, and managing a monthly donation scheme which has supported missions in Africa.

While Fr. John's mobility has slowed him up, he keeps busy visiting parishes to make appeals on behalf of the missions, he gives retreats to groups, gives talks on climate issues and

how we should support the message of Pope Francis, and of course writing articles for Comboni Missions magazine. At his Mass we prayed the Mission Prayer for Fr. John which ended: "We thank God for his 50 years of priestly missionary service. May God continue to walk beside him as he seeks to proclaim your Gospel" To which we all answered a loud. AMEN

Fr. John was later able to concelebrate in Northern Ireland, together with Fr. Patrick Neeson in St. Patrick's Church, Ballygalget, Portaferry, Down and Connor Diocese Fr. Patrick, a fellow seminarian and long time friend, was ordained a Comboni Missionary also in 1973 but later joined the Diocese of Down and Connor. It was a wonderful celebration for both priests and parishioners. Our congratulations to Fr. Pat.



Fr. John in the footsteps of St. Daniel Comboni



Frs. John and Patrick.

Nelson Mandela

an advocate for Peace and Reconciliation

February 1990: The release from prison of Nelson Mandela



Nelson Mandela

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Hero of his people's anti-apartheid struggle, Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) became South Africa's first democratically elected president.

In working to free his country from racial division, he led an essentially peaceful revolution. Mandela has surely been venerated by more millions in his lifetime

than any other political figure in history.

Nelson Mandela, leader of the movement to end South African apartheid, was released from prison after 27 years on February 11, 1990. This unexpected "miracle" drew the attention of the whole world. People everywhere let out a sigh of relief and immediately understood that Nelson Mandela would lead his beloved

country gradually but peacefully to equality and democracy. Four hours after leaving prison, Mandela arrived in Cape Town to address more than fifty thousand people gathered outside the city hall. Mandela called on the international community to maintain its sanctions. "I have carried the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. I hope to live to see the achievement of that ideal. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die," he shouted.

These words echoed the famous declaration he made when he was arrested, 27 years before, and he thought he would be condemned to death. This shows that the years in prison had not bent his determination but strengthened it. Mandela once observed that some people are made by prison, others are broken by it. He, of course, was made by it. Which is what made him, in turn, a man for whom it was worth waiting. With hindsight, Mandela used the fiery address also to take up a negotiating position and convince the black majority that he had not made a secret pact with the authorities.

The double struggle

In 1944, Nelson Mandela, a lawyer, at the age of 26, joined the African National Congress (ANC), the oldest black political organization in South Africa, where he was chosen as the leader of Johannesburg's youth wing. In 1952, he became deputy national president of the ANC, advocating nonviolent resistance to apartheid:



Vote ANC

South Africa's institutionalized system of white supremacy and racial segregation.

However, after the massacre of peaceful black demonstrators at Sharpeville in 1960, Nelson helped organize a paramilitary branch of the ANC to engage in guerrilla warfare against the white minority government. He said: "A freedom fighter learns the hard way that it is the oppressor who defines the nature of the struggle, and the oppressed is often left no recourse but to use methods that mirror those of the oppressor. At a certain point, one can only fight fire with fire." About that time Mandela was living on a farm in Rivonia, a suburb north of Johannesburg. His wife Winnie brought him an old air rifle for target practice. One day, he shot a sparrow with it and was mortified when the five-year-old son of a friend complained to him, saying: "Why did you kill

that bird? Its mother will be sad." My mood immediately shifted from one of pride to shame," Mandela recalled. "I felt that this small boy had far more humanity than I did. It was an odd sensation for a man who was the leader of a nascent guerrilla army."

The Long walk to freedom

After been arrested twice before, in June 1964, he was convicted of sabotage along with several other ANC leaders and sentenced to life in prison. Mandela spent the first 18 of his 27 years in jail at the brutal Robben Island Prison. Confined to a small cell without a bed or plumbing, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He could write and receive a letter once every six months, and once a year he was allowed to meet with a visitor for 30 minutes. The other years he was at house ar-

rest. Perhaps the abandonment of his family was his greatest trial during the prison years. The most agonizing experience he suffered in this respect was the death of his eldest son, Thembi, in a car accident. As an adult Thembi had never visited Mandela in prison, seemingly out of a sense of resentment towards his father. Mandela's account of how he battled to contain his grief provides the most moving moment in Mandela's autobiography, "A Long Walk to Freedom". I

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk became South African president and set about dismantling apartheid. He lifted the ban on the ANC, suspended executions, and in February 1990 ordered the release of Nelson Mandela. Later he declared: "If we had not changed in the manner we did, South Africa would be completely isolated. Internally, we would have the equivalent of civil war. The legacy of Mandela – reconciliation – urgently needed to be revived." This is why they kept Mandela alive like the British did with Jomo Kenyatta to become the father of independent Kenya.

Reconciliation in action

In 1993, Mandela and de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. One year later, the ANC won an electoral majority in the country's first free elections, and Mandela was elected South Africa's president. Mandela retired from politics in 1999, but remained a global advocate for peace and social justice until his death in December 2013. Mandela has been above all the person of reconciliation, of the effort of forgiving, even without the condition of reciprocity, with the purpose of uniting a people, knocking down barriers of separation. He managed to do it, giving his country one of the most advanced Constitutional Charter which upholds the rights of all members of the innumerable ethnic units of South Africa.

Another way of understanding South Africa is to recognize it as something of an Old Testament story, a tale of a people struggling to do right but failing time and time again. In the second half of the 20th century, these people had need of a unifying figure to give them a vision of nationhood. Mandela saw the need, understood and assumed the role demanded and gave his life for his people. There lies his greatness, and hence the tears that flew at his death, in the much beloved country and around the world.

‘LECTIO DIVINA’



Introduction :

Many of us struggle to read the Bible with regularity because there are times when, let's just be honest— we don't get much out of it. The process of Lectio Divina can help.

The origins of Lectio Divina can be traced back to a monastic practice of Benedict of Nursia who saw the Bible as given to us by God himself, our maker, who knows us well (see Psalm 139)

He saw the Bible as “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God's Word is powerful, but that's not all. God is also at work through His Holy Spirit and present to us in a powerful way when we study His Word. Let this vision of God's desire to be powerfully present in His Word, inform our use of Lectio Divina.

Gospel – John 6:37-40

Jesus said to the crowds:

“Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me.

And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.”

As we reflect on the message of Eternal life, let us;

1 | Read with Reading Glasses: Which word or phrase stands out?

In silence, prepare to read the passage: put on your reading glasses, if you will, looking out for a word or phrase that draws your attention. Remember this word or phrase and pray it back to God reflecting on how it has struck you or is being used to describe God and our need of Him.

2 | Read with a Magnifying Glass: Search for the person and work of Christ.

How does this passage point to who Jesus is and what He has done to save, redeem, heal, rescue. How do we see His suffering and sacrificial love anew. How do we see His triumph over death, sin, evil afresh? How does this passage point us to Christ.

3 | Read as a Mirror: What does this passage reveal about you?

What is God showing you about yourself as you read this passage? How are you invited to reflect on your relationships: to God, to yourself, to others, to your work in His creation? What dignity does this passage describe in you? What brokenness does this passage describe in you?

4 | Read as a Telescope: How does this passage help you imagine God's Kingdom as a reality?

What will life be like in the new heavens and new earth when God restores all things and brings an end to evil? What are ways you can embody what God has shown you in this passage about His grace and redemptive work right now? How does God's promise to “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5) cause you to take notice of the injustice, oppression, and experience of those in relational and economic poverty? How would you pray for your church community and the communities you find yourself in at work, through parenting, through hobbies, immediate and extended family, etc.

Conclude your prayer with a promise or praise from the passage.

Core Message

For this is the will of my Father that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in Him;

The relationship of “Father” and “Son” is thus preserved. It is the divine will that no one should be excluded.

For it is not just so to see him, as merely to believe what he is, the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour of the world, or what he says, but to trust in him for righteous-

ness, life, and happiness.

We are by nature blind, our eyes are shut to all that is spiritually good; it is the Spirit of God that opens blind eyes, and illuminates the understanding; and in his light we see not only ourselves, our sin, and want of righteousness, and our lost state and condition, but Christ, and a beauty, glory, and a fulness of all grace; for it is the will of God, and not man, of a gracious Father, of an unchangeable and eternal being, whose will cannot be resisted, and made void, that such

May have everlasting life;

which will be a life of glory, and will consist in possessing glory both in soul and body; in beholding glory, the glory of one another, the glory of angels, the glory of divine truths, and mysterious providences, the glory of the divine perfections, and of the Lord Jesus Christ; and it will be a life of perfection, of perfect knowledge, holiness, obedience, love, peace, and joy; a life free from all the miseries and inconveniences of this, both in a natural and spiritual sense; a life of pleasure, and which will last for ever: to which Christ adds,

And I will raise him up at the last day;

Christ will indeed raise all the dead by his power, but the saints particularly, by virtue of union to him, as the members of his body, and in the first place; and the very same shall rise, and with the same numerical body, that were given to him, and believe in him: and this will be at the last of the last days, at the end of all things; and is mentioned to show, that length of time will not hinder the resurrection of the dead

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Thank you once again for your most welcome letters. It reminds us that some people do read our missionary magazine! Reading today is becoming less and less a daily pleasure.

To encourage you all our readers: to let us know your thoughts and opinions, I will post here my address so that your comments come directly to our office!

**Editor, Verona Fathers - Email: jdcomboni@gmail.com
London Road, Sunningdale SL5 0JY#, Berks, England**

You Write

Dear Father,

I have just finished reading the wonderful life of Blessed Ambrosoli. A most wonderful saintly person doing the will of God.

I hope you don't mind but I couldn't help but equate him in some way to my dear St. Don Bosco. One working to save the souls of the poor and abandoned street kids of Turin during the most difficult times in that city and Blessed Joseph working constantly to save the lives of all the sick that came to his hospital. We are privileged to have these two Saints to help us through our lives.

Yours faithfully

*John Bosco Whitehead
Farnworth, Bolton*



Blessed Joseph Ambrosoli



Dear Father,

It was very interesting to read about the work of Brother Antonio de Faria among the Nuer in South Sudan. Brother Marco gave a good account of the life of these people.

I would just like to add more details.

In South Sudan the second largest ethnic groups are the Dinka and Nuer tribes. They are in constant conflict over pastures. Cattle is the most important possession in the economic, cultural and religious life amongst the Nuer. As Brother Marco explained, cattle are used in exchange for a bride but also play an important role in their language and culture. Their survival evolves around cattle.

They produce clothes, drums, leather goods and even tooth-paste and mouthwash from cattle. They kill only old cattle or animals dying from disease. After killing the animal, they perform rituals, dancing and singing.

Their life was part of a study by E.E. Evans Pritchard on the connection between cattle and the Nuer lifestyle.

As far as religion is concerned only 1% of the Nuer are Christian through the work of the Christian missionaries.

Yours faithfully,

*Elena Rowland
Woolwich, London*

A close-up photograph of numerous pink hydrangea flowers, filling the entire background of the page. The petals are a vibrant pink color with visible veins. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, creating a dense and textured floral pattern.

In Loving Memory

The names sent to us of all those
who have died are entered on our

LIST OF THE DEAD

They are placed on the altars of our
chapels and remain there during
the month of November. We pray that our
departed brothers and sisters may have
eternal rest with the Lord, and that their
families and friends may be consoled and
comforted in their loss.



*Don't Forget your Deceased Loved Ones
in this Year's November Masses.*

Why not have them remembered the whole year round, too!

The Holy Redeemer Perpetual Mass Guild

Holy Mass is celebrated every day for all members, living and dead. Quality Membership Certificates in full colour, mounted in beautiful folders, make an excellent gift, or a gesture of condolence, or simply a reminder of spiritual union with our missionaries. Certificates will, on request, be sent directly to those you wish to receive them.



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