



MISSIONS TODAY

VOL 78, NO. 2

SUMMER 2020

**Jesus is still with us even in the middle
of the storm: COVID-19 and the Missions.**



Inside this issue

**the missionary lives of
Bishop Swamy and Fr. Boos.**

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

National Director's Message

Mission Today Summer Issue 2020



Human beings have been affected in many ways by COVID-19 pandemic. Government policies have necessitated turning everything we know and cherish upside down. We have been struggling to find ways to endure keeping our distance, wearing mask, washing our hands after every outing. Our stress and anxieties are high by the fear of contacting the virus

as we see each day the number of cases confirmed positive and deaths from coronavirus. Our pains run deep as we experience the death of family members, co-workers and friends as a result of COVID-19.

I know as Catholics, we find it hard as we hunger for the Eucharist now that our attendance at Mass is limited to livestreaming video broadcast on our computers, televisions and phones. As people of faith, we are called to face the fears of this moment with a courage not our own and with generous heart. God is with his people in good times and in bad. Like believers in every age we say, "If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear for You (God) are there." For almost 3,000 years those who know God have prayed this prayer in time of comfort, war and peace. When persecution, anxiety and sickness threaten to overwhelm us. Today, in union with our brothers and sisters of every nation on earth, together facing the threat of the coronavirus, we pray to God with deep awareness of our need and with hope: "Even though we walk in the dark valley, we fear no evil for you O God are with us giving us courage."

During all this, we have experienced frustration that comes from being stuck in our homes and now we live with anguish of the loneliness of not being with friends and people dear to us. As we experience these emotions, we come to realize the reality of what our seniors, refugees, street children, mothers and fathers feel each day in their lives. We now know the feelings of loneliness, despair and frustration that engulf our dear ones who were once joyful.

What we now feel must serve as a fire needed to light the desire to support an emergency fund established by Pope Francis to help those people and communities who are being tragically impacted by the spread of Coronavirus. The Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) have been an instrument of the Pope for the benefit of the Churches in mission territories. The intervention framework of PMS remains the institutional one: helping and strengthening young Churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania, in their pastoral activity, tragically marked and challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this issue the editor brings us to experience the missionary life of Fr. John Boos, M.Afr. (Missionary of Africa) who arrived in a small village of Bobo Dioulasso, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) in 1971 and share with us an interview with Bishop Athanasius Rethna Swamy, a missionary in his own country. We will also find in it the Emergency fund appeal and a reflection on COVID-19 by Deacon Dominic Pullano, the Archdiocesan Director of Toronto. You will find at the back of the magazine our Charitable Gift Annuities and rates for your consideration.

"Whoever the poorest of the poor are, they are Christ for us – Christ under the guise of human suffering" (Mother Teresa's reflection).

Rev. Fr. Alexander Osei, C.S.Sp.
National Director.

The Pope's Monthly Prayer Intentions:

Each year, the Holy Father asks for our prayers for a specific intention each month. You are invited to answer the Holy Father's request and to join with many people worldwide in praying for this intention each month.

MAY : For Deacons

We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church.

JUNE : The Way of the Heart

We pray that all those who suffer may find their way in life, allowing themselves to be touched by the Heart of Jesus.

JULY : Our Families

We pray that today's families may be accompanied with love, respect and guidance.

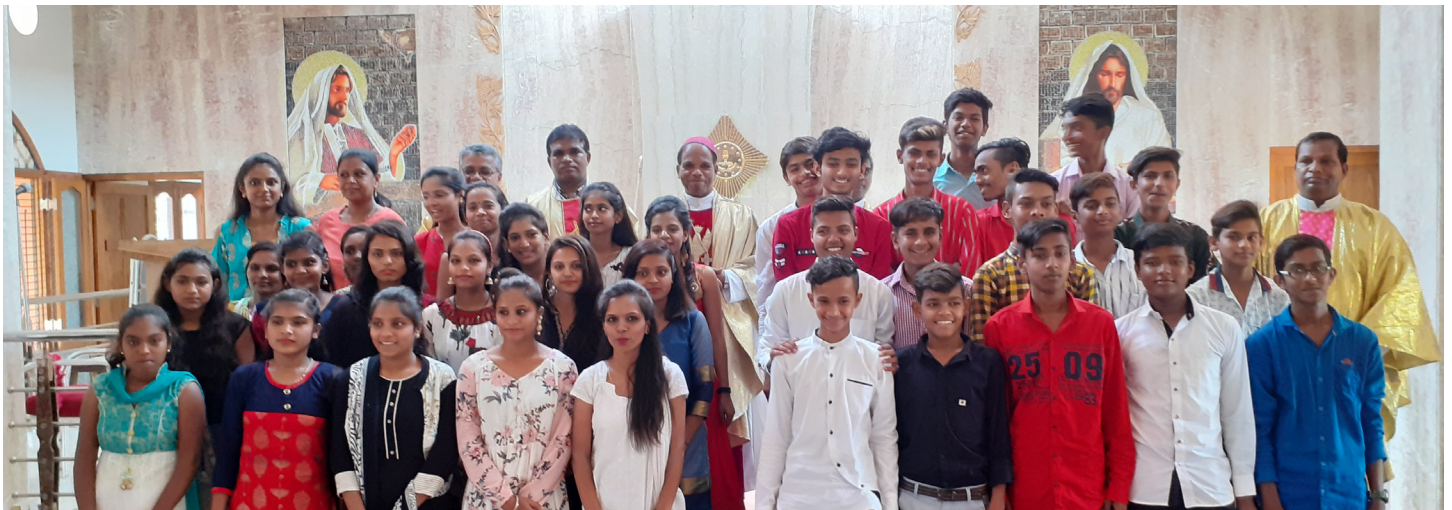
AUGUST : The Maritime World

We pray for all those who work and live from the sea, among them sailors, fishermen and their families.

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Bishop Swamy, who is interviewed in this issue, with young members of his flock.

Photo by Bishop Swamy



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Across the Globe

*The Pontifical Mission Societies host their own web news service called **agenzia fides**. The news service is updated daily and allows us to keep current about events around the world and within Catholic missions. Below are three articles from the website and other news can be found at fides.org.*



AFRICA/UGANDA - Covid-19: containment measures work, but the damage to the economy is serious

http://www.fides.org/en/news/67825-AFRICA_UGANDA_Covid_19_containment_measures_work_but_the_damage_to_the_economy_is_serious

Gulu (Agenzia Fides) - The virus has not yet reached Gulu. At St Mary's Lacor Hospital, however, everything is ready. Non-acute patients were sent home. The Medicine department has been equipped for the infected by Covid-19. A dozen intensive care beds have been set up, with five ventilators (others are coming). "In Uganda - Cristina Reverzani, a volunteer doctor who works in the obstetrics and gynecology ward of the Catholic hospital, owned by the diocese, explains to Fides - the coronavirus epidemic has been taken very seriously. On March 22 the first case was registered and the borders were blocked, schools and sacred places were closed. Three days later public and private transport was stopped and the market lockdown was proclaimed. Law enforcement was very severe. Too much, to the point that President Yoweri Museveni intervened to ask for more clemency".

The measures seem to have worked. Currently there are not more than sixty cases and no deaths. "Most of these cases - continues the doctor - are people who were infected abroad and brought the virus back to Uganda. It must be said that some factors seem to preserve the population from the coronavirus. The population is very young (average age under 17 years old), vaccinations against

TB and a mild climate (above 20°) seem to represent natural barriers to the infection. Nothing is scientifically proven, but the swabs that are regularly carried out on Ugandans are practically all negative".

The population of Northern Uganda is frightened, still remembers the devastating ebola epidemic that hit the region in the early 2000s. "The memory of that epidemic is particularly vivid - continues the doctor -. The Acholi population who lives in this area has done an ancient ritual to cast out the virus. It had not been repeated since the times of Ebola".

Although the contagion is not spreading much, the virus is still causing enormous economic damage. "The lockdown - explains Elio Croce, a Comboni missionary who has been serving in Uganda since the 1970s in favor of orphans, the sick, the disabled, child soldiers, victims of AIDS and Ebola - blocks travelling and this greatly damages poor people who earns a living day by day. Farmers cannot sell their products. And they have nothing to take home. Children do not go to school and so fathers and mothers find themselves having to feed other mouths. For many families the situation is becoming difficult".

The lockdown should end on May 5: "We must resist until then - concludes brother Elio - then we hope that there will be an opening that allows a recovery of life if not at normal levels, at least to allow poor people to obtain the necessary". (EC) (*Agenzia Fides*, 29/4/2020)

AMERICA/URUGUAY - May 1: "An embrace of solidarity in the pain and difficulties of workers, a message of great hope"

<http://www.fides.org/en/news/67829>

Montevideo (Agenzia Fides) - This May 1st "finds us in the midst of a global storm, imagining a future of great economic and social crisis that will require the greatest responsibility and generosity of all, social movements and the State, for a new day to appear, a new world and a new humanity": says the President of the Department of Social Pastoral Care DEPAS-Cáritas, Mgr. Pedro Wolcan Olano, Bishop of Tacuarembó to workers. "Great crises can be great opportunities for change of course which today seems urgent. We are certain of it", underlines the Bishop on the occasion of workers' day, which is celebrated on 1st May, in the text sent to Fides.

"In one week, thousands of workers found themselves without a job, asking to be assured against unemployment, while the many informal workers are even less protected", writes the Bishop, stressing that "the response of the people was not long in coming: the initial amazement had not yet passed when 'popular kitchens' and 'baskets of solidarity' flourished throughout the country, responding to the most urgent needs".

The message recalls the "very moving" letter that Pope Francis sent on Easter Sunday to Social Movements, in which he said: "If the fight against Covid is a war, you are a true invisible army fighting in the most dangerous trenches. An army that has no other weapon than solidarity, hope and a sense of community that is reinvigorated in these days when nobody saves themselves".

The President of DEPAS-Caritas thanks in particular "all the health workers who are at the forefront of their lives to save many others" and whoever covers essential services at the moment. "We are not alone. We have each other, which is also the meaning and the profound message of the celebration of Workers' Day", underlines the message. "But Christians also have another certainty which is the basis of our utmost hope and which we want to share today with this greeting: the risen Jesus lives and walks with us".

"Dear brothers and sisters workers of this beloved Uruguay, our greeting in this 2020 starting from the harsh reality, wants to be at the same time an embrace of solidarity in the pain and difficulties of the workers and their families, a message of great hope: We trust in the Lord and in our people!" concludes the Bishop. (SL) (Agenzia Fides, 30/4/2020)

ASIA/HOLY LAND - A parish priest in Jerusalem: "Israelis and Palestinians expect solid and lasting peace"

http://www.fides.org/en/news/67830-ASIA_HOLY LAND_A_parish_priest_in_Jerusalem_Israelis_and_Palestinians_expect_solid_and_lasting_peace

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - "The heartfelt invitation of the Holy Father to end armed conflicts around the world has been greeted with great joy and hope by Israelis and Palestinians, who have long been waiting for a moment of lasting peace. There are currently no clashes, but a state of deep mistrust remains between the two populations". This is what Fr. Amjad Sabbara, belonging to the Order of

Friars Minor (OFM) and parish priest of the Latin Church of San Salvatore in Jerusalem, reports to Agenzia Fides about the appeal to the "global ceasefire" launched by the UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez, and officially supported on 29 March, by Pope Francis, while the world faces the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A year after the political elections in Israel, the executive, which in this time frame had not been able to reach an agreement within the time allowed by law, is about to exit the impasse: on April 20, 2020, in fact, outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main political opponent Benny Gantz, reached an agreement to form a national emergency government, also driven by the condition of uncertainty triggered by the world pandemic. Against the backdrop of this new political situation, the front of the conflict experienced many episodes of upsurge in the last months of 2019. Especially in Gaza, where tension has increased again: on the one hand the balloon bombs and rockets, launched by the Strip in the desert from Negev, sometimes hit Israeli civilian buildings; on the other hand, the harsh response of the Jewish state, with its air raids.

The situation in Gaza continues to be dramatic: the Israeli naval embargo has deprived about 4,000 Gaza fishermen of their only source of livelihood. Even in Jerusalem tension periodically rises again. At the center of the question is, once again, the Esplanade of the Mosques, which has become the scene of incursions by fundamentalists linked to messianic movements.

To this difficult situation is added the ongoing medical emergency: in the Jewish state, to date, there are over 15,800 confirmed cases of coronavirus, with 215 deaths. In the Palestinian territories the infected have exceeded 500. And the numbers seem destined to rise. In this time of restrictions, the support of the parish priests of the Custody of the Holy Land comes "with a series of initiatives that we have put in place to continue to take care of our parishioners", explains the Franciscan religious. "This year in Jerusalem - Father Sabbara says - after the Easter vigil that takes place in the Holy Sepulcher on Saturday morning, we commissioned some scouts to bring the holy light to the houses of the Old City. It was an unexpected joy for many faithful who were able to light a candle with holy fire". The friars who work in the Latin parish of San Salvatore set up a small committee of faithful, where everyone carries out his or her own task, such as: video catechesis for the children who are preparing for their confirmation or telematic appointments with the Franciscan youth every two weeks. "With the help of our emergency committee - the parish priest of Jerusalem underlines - we are assisting many families in difficulty. It is not easy for many to stay at home, in often inadequate spaces and in situations of economic uncertainty".

The Franciscan knows the situation well: during the so-called second Intifada he was present in the siege of the Nativity of Bethlehem (from April 2 to May 10, 2002) and was involved in negotiations to find an agreement with the 240 Palestinian militants who had taken refuge in the Basilica to escape capture by the Israeli army. "What we hope for - concludes Father Amjad - is that we will finally reach a fair solution, which respects the dignity and security of both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians". (ES-PA) (Agenzia Fides, 30/4/2020)

URBI ET ORBI MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

EASTER 2020 - Saint Peter's Basilica Easter, 12 April 2020

Dear brothers and sisters, Happy Easter!

Today the Church's proclamation echoes throughout the world: "Jesus Christ is risen!" – "He is truly risen!".

Like a new flame this Good News springs up in the night: the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges and now oppressed by a pandemic severely testing our whole human family. In this night, the Church's voice rings out: "Christ, my hope, has arisen!" (Easter Sequence).

This is a different "contagion", a message transmitted from heart to heart – for every human heart awaits this Good News. It is the contagion of hope: "Christ, my hope, is risen!". This is no magic formula that makes problems vanish. No, the resurrection of Christ is not that. Instead, it is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not "by-pass" suffering and death, but passes through them, opening a path in the abyss, transforming evil into good: this is the unique hallmark of the power of God.

The Risen Lord is also the Crucified One, not someone else. In his glorious body he bears indelible wounds: wounds that have become windows of hope. Let us turn our gaze to him that he may heal the wounds of an afflicted humanity.

Today my thoughts turn in the first place to the many who have been directly affected by the coronavirus: the sick, those who have died and family members who mourn the loss of their loved ones, to whom, in some cases, they were unable even to bid a final farewell. May the Lord of life welcome the departed into his kingdom and grant comfort and hope to those still suffering, especially the elderly and those who are alone. May he never withdraw his consolation and help from those who are especially vulnerable, such as persons who work in nursing homes, or live in barracks and prisons. For many, this is an Easter of solitude lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties.

This disease has not only deprived us of human closeness, but also of the possibility of receiving in person the consolation that flows from the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation. In many countries, it has not been possible to approach them, but the Lord has not left us alone! United in our prayer, we are convinced that he has laid his hand upon us (cf. Ps 138:5), firmly reassuring us: Do not be afraid, "I have risen and I am with you still!" (cf. Roman Missal, Entrance Antiphon, Mass of Easter Sunday).

May Jesus, our Passover, grant strength and hope to doctors and nurses, who everywhere offer a witness of care and love for our

neighbours, to the point of exhaustion and not infrequently at the expense of their own health. Our gratitude and affection go to them, to all who work diligently to guarantee the essential services necessary for civil society, and to the law enforcement and military personnel who in many countries have helped ease people's difficulties and sufferings.

In these weeks, the lives of millions of people have suddenly changed. For many, remaining at home has been an opportunity to reflect, to withdraw from the frenetic pace of life, stay with loved ones and enjoy their company. For many, though, this is also a time of worry about an uncertain future, about jobs that are at risk and about other consequences of the current crisis. I encourage political leaders to work actively for the common good, to provide the means and resources needed to enable everyone to lead a dignified life and, when circumstances allow, to assist them in resuming their normal daily activities.

This is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic. May the risen Jesus grant hope to all the poor, to those living on the peripheries, to refugees and the homeless. May these, the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters living in the cities and peripheries of every part of the world, not be abandoned. Let us ensure that they do not lack basic necessities (all the more difficult to find now that many businesses are closed) such as medicine and especially the possibility of adequate health care. In light of the present circumstances, may international sanctions be relaxed, since these make it difficult for countries on which they have been imposed to provide adequate support to their citizens, and may all nations be put in a position to meet the greatest needs of the moment through the reduction, if not the forgiveness, of the debt burdening the balance sheets of the poorest nations.

This is not a time for self-centredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons. Among the many areas of the world affected by the coronavirus, I think in a special way of Europe. After the Second World War, this continent was able to rise again, thanks to a concrete spirit of solidarity that enabled it to overcome the rivalries of the past. It is more urgent than ever, especially in the present circumstances, that these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another. The European Union is presently facing an epochal challenge, on which will depend not only its future but that of the whole world. Let us not lose the opportunity to give further proof of solidarity, also by turning to innovative solutions. The only alternative is the

selfishness of particular interests and the temptation of a return to the past, at the risk of severely damaging the peaceful coexistence and development of future generations.

This is not a time for division. May Christ our peace enlighten all who have responsibility in conflicts, that they may have the courage to support the appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. This is not a time for continuing to manufacture and deal in arms, spending vast amounts of money that ought to be used to care for others and save lives. Rather, may this be a time for finally ending the long war that has caused such great bloodshed in beloved Syria, the conflict in Yemen and the hostilities in Iraq and in Lebanon. May this be the time when Israelis and Palestinians resume dialogue in order to find a stable and lasting solution that will allow both to live in peace. May the sufferings of the people who live in the eastern regions of Ukraine come to an end. May the terrorist attacks carried out against so many innocent people in different African countries come to an end.

This is not a time for forgetfulness. The crisis we are facing should not make us forget the many other crises that bring suffering to so many people. May the Lord of life be close to all those in Asia and Africa who are experiencing grave humanitarian crises, as in the Province of Cabo Delgado in the north of Mozambique. May he warm the hearts of the many refugees displaced because of wars,

drought and famine. May he grant protection to migrants and refugees, many of them children, who are living in unbearable conditions, especially in Libya and on the border between Greece and Turkey. And I do not want to forget the island of Lesbos. In Venezuela, may he enable concrete and immediate solutions to be reached that can permit international assistance to a population suffering from the grave political, socio-economic and health situation.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Indifference, self-centredness, division and forgetfulness are not words we want to hear at this time. We want to ban these words for ever! They seem to prevail when fear and death overwhelm us, that is, when we do not let the Lord Jesus triumph in our hearts and lives. May Christ, who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into the light of his glorious day, a day that knows no end.

With these thoughts, I would like to wish all of you a happy Easter.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html

VATICAN - An emergency fund established

by the Pope at the Pontifical Mission Societies for Covid-19

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Holy Father has established an emergency fund at the Pontifical Mission Societies, in order to come to the aid of those people and communities who are being tragically impacted by the spread of COVID-19. The Emergency Fund will be used to accompany impacted communities in mission countries via Church structures and institutions.

Cardinal Tagle, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, welcomes the announcement:

“In her task of evangelization, the Church is often on the front lines of major threats to human well-being. In Africa alone, there are over 74,000 religious sisters and over 46,000 priests operating 7,274 hospitals and clinics, 2,346 homes for elderly and the vulnerable, and educating over 19 million children in 45,088 primary schools. In many rural areas they are the only providers of healthcare and education”. The Cardinal continued: “The Holy Father is calling upon the Church’s entire vast network to face the challenges ahead”.

The Holy Father has designated US \$ 750,000 as an initial contribution for the fund and has asked that those Church entities that are able and desirous to help, to contribute to this fund through

the Pontifical Mission Societies in each Country.

Archbishop Giampietro Dal Toso, President of the Pontifical Mission Societies, said: “This fund has the aim of supporting the presence of the Church in mission territories, which also suffers the consequences of Corona Virus. Through the Church’s activity of preaching the Gospel and of practical aid through our vast network, we can show that no one is alone in this crisis. In this sense, the Church’s institutions and ministers play a vital role. This is the Holy Father’s intention in establishing this Fund. While so many are suffering, we remember and reach out to those who may have no one to care for them, thus showing forth the love of God the Father”.

The Pontifical Mission Societies is the Holy Father’s official channel of support for more than 1,110 dioceses mostly in Asia, Africa, Oceania and part of the Amazon region. The Archbishop continued: “I call upon our network of Pontifical Mission Societies, present in every diocese around the world, to do what they can to support this important initiative of the Holy Father”.

(Agenzia Fides, 6/4/2020)

“If you would like to donate to this emergency fund or require further information, please see the next page.”



Africa



Asia



Oceania



Europe



South America

The Holy Father's COVID19 Emergency Fund

The Pontifical Mission Societies



Dear Friend,

Peace be with you. The Holy Father has established an emergency fund at the Pontifical Mission Societies, in order to come to the aid of those people and communities who are being tragically impacted by the spread of COVID-19. The Emergency Fund will be used to accompany communities in mission countries via Church structures and institutions.

The Holy Father is calling upon the Church's entire vast network to face the challenges ahead and has designated an initial contribution for the fund. He asked that individuals and Church entities that are able and desirous to help, to contribute to this fund through the Pontifical Mission Societies in each Country.

May you be blessed and protected by Christ's loving embrace. Be assured of our prayers for you and your family. Thank you for your love and care for the missions. **Happy Easter!**

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Alex Osei, C.S.Sp.
National Director



YES!

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Living in Nigeria

with the Hardships Imposed by COVID-19

(As was noted on the previous page, Pope Francis established an emergency fund specifically for those living in mission areas. This emergency fund that is to be administered by the PMS is desperately needed because, while our situation in Canada may be grim, it is exponentially worse in developing parts of the world. The article below about the situation in Nigeria during this pandemic is one example of the devastating consequences that the COVID-19 virus has had in those parts of the world. In this article, you will see why your generosity is needed more than ever at this time. If you are in a position to donate, see how you can do so on the previous page.)

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in Africa with a population of about 180 million people. Before March 23rd, 2020, Nigerians were going about their normal activities while reading and watching news about the Corona virus that was taking lives in Wuhan, China. As the virus started spreading to other parts of the world like Europe and America, with devastating consequences, the Federal Government started taking precautionary measures to prevent its spread in Nigeria after the country had discovered that an Italian, who flew into the country, was infected, when the result of the test conducted on him was released on January 28, 2020. One of the first actions taken to curtail the spread of the virus was an order that all schools in the country be closed down as from the 23rd of March 2020. Various state governments would issue their orders later during the month in conformity with the Federal Government's directives. ...Local and international airports were closed down and they are still closed at the time of writing. ...

(COVID-19 has affected many sectors of the country.) COVID-19 has thrown the nation into chaos from the economic point of view. Nigeria depends greatly on revenues from crude oil and with the nose-dive fall of the price of crude oil at the international market, the country is bound to enter into economic recession during and after the pandemic. ...At the moment most of the workers in the private sector are receiving either no salaries or half salaries. Dependents of salary earners would have to suffer the implication. Some state governments have not been able to pay salaries of their workers. The country will experience job loss in many sectors as there will be an economic recession at the end of the pandemic. The sad consequence of this is that there will be further increase in crime in the country.

Easter is the mother of all Christian feasts as it celebrates the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ which have brought salvation to the world. The lockdown of the country during the Easter Season, particularly, during the Easter Triduum, was a great blow to the Church in Nigeria as the feast draws thousands of people to the church; even those who are not committed to their faith take

it seriously during the celebration of the Easter Triduum. It is during this time that people normally go for confession in droves, are baptized, pay their annual dues to support the church and some even get married.

... (During Holy Week), the state government ordered that all churches and mosques should be closed down; consequently, Christians celebrated the Easter Triduum in their families. It was a sad moment for Christians in the country. The social media was employed to stream religious programs for the spiritual edification of the faithful while the faithful were encouraged to promote home churches by gathering and praying together in families.

The close down of the church, apart from religious implications that people cannot come together to worship God, has serious financial implications for the church. In this part of the country, priests and church workers normally live on Sunday collections the laity brings as there are no other means of raising money. The implication is that priests who live from hand to mouth, especially, those in rural areas are going through hell in trying to put food on their tables.

Nigerians are beginning to appreciate most of the values they started taking for granted such as social interactions that occur at market squares, churches, mosques and academic institutions as some are becoming depressed as a result of the inability to interact at such venues. ...

The educational sector was the first to be closed down to curtail the spread of the virus. Students have since been staying at home for over a month and most of these, (are) finding no means of survival and (are) being idle ... Many private academic institutions will not be able to pay salaries in the coming months which will bring a lot of hardships for the workers in such private institutions.

Submitted by Kuha INDYER, CSSp, a Spiritan priest and principal of Holy Ghost College, a Catholic school in Nigeria.



Villagers fleeing their homes in Nigeria to escape the threat of COVID-19

Photo by Fr. Kuha Indyer, CSSp

A Missionary in His Own Country:

AN INTERVIEW WITH BISHOP ATHANASIUS RETHNA SWAMY

In the later part of February 2020, the Archdiocese of Toronto was honoured to host Bishop Athanasius Rethna Swamy. Bishop Swamy is the ordinary of the Diocese of Ahmedabad which is situated in the province of Gujarat, India. The Diocese of Ahmedabad in northwest India is, like so many other dioceses in missionary territories, large in area but small in the number of Catholics who inhabit it. Bishop Swamy was in the Toronto area to attend the annual fundraiser for one of his small, rural parishes, St. Joseph in Tarapur, India. Organized by the parish of St. David's in Maple, ON, the Bishop came to express his gratitude for the financial support that the Maple parish had provided the Tarapur community over the years. The Bishop was also given another substantial donation with which to return to India. The editor of Mission Today had the privilege on March 3, 2020 to sit down with Bishop Swamy and to learn more about his Diocese and missionary activity. Most of all, the life of this remarkable man will demonstrate how one can become a missionary in one's own country.

A Missionary Call is Heard

Bishop Swamy grew up in a small village in south India on the family farm. His family was among many traditional Catholic families who had practiced the faith for many generations. His early years included the daily praying of the rosary with his family and attending the local Catholic school. His mother was an important figure in the small village community as she had knowledge of many of the local medicinal herbs and remedies. She was also the local mid-wife and took care of sick livestock. Her contact with many of the other villagers and her compassion for the sick provided her with many opportunities to proclaim the Gospel which many of her patients would come to accept. This evangelical fervour of his mother would prove to have a major influence on the life of her son.

The school in the village in which Bishop Swamy lived went only to grade five. He would then continue his education in a nearby city at a school run by the Carmelite Fathers (OCD). It was at this boarding school that Bishop Swamy would begin to hear God's call to the priesthood. The participation at daily mass and recitation of the rosary and reading the lives of the saints inspired him to give his life to God in the priesthood. Moreover, the example of his favourite saint and Indian Catholic hero, St. Francis Xavier, not to mention the example of his mother, would ignite in Bishop Swamy a desire to become more precisely a missionary priest. After high school, Bishop Swamy had the option to attend the local diocesan seminary or a seminary that was sending seminarians to North Indian mission. He joined the latter and so was cho-

sen as a missionary in the diocese of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. He was not even certain where Gujarat was located. The diocese of Ahmedabad sent him to a seminary, run by the Dominicans. This seminary was assisted financially by the Propaganda Fede. Bishop Swamy reports that he received not only a solid theological instruction, but just as significantly, a profound spiritual formation as well. He was especially assisted in those years by his spiritual director, Dominican Father Noel Molloy.

Bishop Swamy was ordained a priest in 1989 and was sent to a mission station in the Diocese of Ahmedabad where he would begin his priestly ministry in the Indian state of Gujarat. Most of the Indians who had been Catholics over several generations live in the south of India. The Catholics in the north represent more recent converts to the faith. The population of Catholics in major parts of northern India is sparse and thinly spread, especially in the rural areas. Rural areas in the north of India, therefore, often do not have enough Catholics to maintain a parish. Mission stations were established in these areas to meet the spiritual needs of these fledgling Catholic communities.

When Bishop Swamy arrived at his mission station in Gujarat, his first task was to learn the local language and to make contact with his parishioners by visiting them in their homes. His Bishop, then, asked him to start a school and to take care of a hostel for boys. An order of sisters was also assigned to take care of a hostel for girls and they also assisted admirably with other mission activities. Bishop Swamy would spend that second year of priesthood taking on every conceivable role in the school, from principal to teacher, from clerk to custodian.

After that year as a school administrator, he was reassigned to be the Rector of a minor seminary in his diocese, in the city of Ahmedabad. This assignment would be interrupted, after two years, as Bishop Swamy accepted a scholarship to attend the Gregorian University in Rome. Bishop Swamy enrolled in a four-year psychology program that interweaved the contemporary study of psychology with the insights into the human condition from the teachings of Jesus. He indicated that he was blessed to have a Jesuit priest as both a Dean of the Institute and mentor while studying in Rome. After he completed his degree, Bishop Swamy would return to his diocese to assume the duties of director of the major seminary for the next four years. In those years, as a result of his newly acquired skill set, he was also assigned to be spiritual director and confessor to various communities of religious sisters, seminarians, and even his brother priests. During his time at the seminary, he would continue to help in parishes and mission stations.



Bishop Swamy, pictured in the centre with two of his fellow Bishops, processes through the streets of his diocese on the day of his installation as Bishop of Ahmedabad.

From 2002 to 2012, Bishop Swamy would once again become the director of the minor seminary for his diocese. Bishop Swamy would mention that the minor seminary, like the major seminary as well, would not have had the funds to continue to operate if it had not been for the support of the St. Peter Society. Bishop Swamy was most proud of creating an environmentally friendly surrounding with the help of the seminarians. Again, he was appointed rector of the major seminarians from 2012 to 2018. He was a professor and a spiritual director in the seminary. Then, after several years in the area of formation, Bishop Swamy would receive a call from the Apostolic Nuncio to India. The Nuncio would inform him that he had been appointed to be the next Bishop for the Diocese of Ahmedabad. His only reservation on being appointed to the episcopal order concerned the political climate in India (more on this point below).

Bishop Swamy was ordained to the episcopate on April 14, 2018. He insisted that his ordination be a simple affair and that any funds earmarked for these festivities be distributed among the poor. In fact, he used the financial gifts from his episcopal ordination to start a fund for the needy in his diocese to aid them with food, education, and medicine. As a Bishop, he has had two principal objectives. The first is to improve the lot of Catholics in the rural areas of his diocese. With the education that Catholic children receive in the cities, they are able to build a decent life for themselves. But this is not so, in the rural areas of the diocese. Bishop Swamy would like to promote the wellbeing of those in the margins in his diocese. His second objective concerns the priests of his Diocese. He would like to see the clergy be more compassionate with their people and to live a simpler lifestyle. As Pope Francis might say, Bishop Swamy would like for his priests to have on them the smell of their sheep.

The Diocese of Ahmedabad

Bishop Swamy's Diocese consists of 45 parishes. Half of these parishes are located in urban centres and are comprised of more

established Catholics, both spiritually and financially. The rest of them are mission stations whose Catholic population, as has been mentioned previously, are newer converts. There are currently 155 priests ministering in the diocese. There are 80 diocesan priests and 75 priests from religious orders, principally Jesuits and also Salesians, Pillarians and Pallottines. Of the diocesan priests, seventeen are from Gujarat or local vocations. All the parishes and mission stations are supported by a good number of religious sisters. The responsibilities of these sisters range from hospital work, education, pastoral work and they even do social work within the parishes. There is only one major hospital in the diocese, but the sisters run a number of dispensaries, providing much needed medication to the poor. Bishop Swamy was keen to point out that the most famous son to come from the state of Gujarat was Mahatma Gandhi himself.

Catholic Education

As Bishop Swamy would explain, all parishes in the Diocese of Ahmedabad have Catholic schools to ensure that education is provided to the children of the area. Catholic schools have assumed a central role in the missionary efforts in India that date back to the early Spanish missionaries. Others did not provide an education to Indian children from the lower classes of society (i.e. the caste system), as they were not considered worthy enough to warrant an education. Missionaries began to fill that void by establishing schools designed specifically for them. Indian parents would send their children to Catholic schools, even if they were not Catholic themselves, in the hope that an education would give their children a better future. By sending their children to Catholic schools, not only were the clergy and sisters that worked at the schools able to evangelize the students, they were able to proclaim the gospel message to the parents as well. By listening to the stories of the students about their families, missionaries were able to get a better grasp of the people they were serving and formulate more effective strategies for proclaiming the Gospel to them. Indeed, many In-



dian Catholics would be able to trace the origins of their family's faith journey to the influence of a Catholic school.

Most of the schools, because the students come from far and wide have hostels for the children to eat and sleep. The priests and male teachers, who also live on-site, tend to the needs of the male students. The sisters who have their own residence nearby look after the female population. In the schools that have been in existence longer, many of the students have gone on to become doctors, nurses, teachers, and factory workers. Christians in the rural areas, however, continue to struggle due to the

lack of meaningful employment in their vicinity. According to Bishop Swamy, the Holy Childhood Society is promoted within the schools in his diocese. He explained that they do not want the students to develop a beggar mentality. Rather, they want to demonstrate to the students that they too can give back to the wider church and society.

Current Political Tensions

The Catholic Church in India, indeed all minorities, are currently facing a major challenge. The current ruling political party in India is striving to create a Hindu Kingdom. This conservative, right-wing party seems to believe that India is a Hindu state and only Hindus are the true citizens of the country. All non-Hindus, such as Muslims and Christians are to be pushed to the margins. The policies of the ruling party have created a great deal of religious unrest in the country and has fomented strife between people of different religious backgrounds. An attempt has been made through the recently legalized policies by the government to identify people on the basis of their religion. There is a fear that this knowledge may be used against those who are minorities. The poor would be impacted the most by these draconian policies. If non-Hindus cannot prove that they are citizens of the country, which many poor Indians do not have the necessary paperwork, they could be detained in detention centres.

The Indian government does not easily give the Catholic Church permission to construct new churches or schools. Government officials are scrutinizing parish activities and baptisms of adults, as conversion to other faith traditions has been declared illegal. The government seem to support a "Return-home" policy, where vulnerable non-Hindus are alternatively threatened or bribed to return to Hinduism. For instance, there are scholarships offered to the children of Hindus whereas it is denied to Christian students. Other impacts on the Catholic Church in India include sporadic

attacks on churches and other Church-run institutions. In short, one requires a great deal of courage to be a Catholic today in India and Bishop Swamy has demonstrated this steadfastness of faith to his people.

St. Joseph's Parish in Tarapur, India

As was indicated in the introduction, Bishop Swamy came to Canada to thank the donors who contribute to the running of a small, rural parish, named St. Joseph's at Tarapur. The parish of St. Joseph began as a sub-station of a larger parish in 2002. For the first twelve years, there was no resident pastor. Mass was celebrated there only twice a month, once by the pastor of the parish with which it was associated and once by the Bishop Swamy when he was still a priest. The parish initially was administered by a handful of sisters. There was a small school with only two teachers, which most children of the surrounding area could not attend because there was no good road or hostel. The Catholics in Tarapur definitely felt neglected.

In 2014, Fr. Justin, the associate pastor of St. David's parish in Maple, ON, who was on-loan to the Archdiocese of Toronto from the Diocese of Ahmadabad, urged his Canadian parishioners to support this struggling Catholic community in India. Through the funds that were raised at an annual gala, a proper school has been built for the children with a hostel for both girls and boys. Along with free accommodations, the students now receive free books, uniforms, and tuition. When the first pastor was appointed for St. Joseph's in 2014, he lived in the sacristy of the small chapel. Today, a priests' residence has been built, as well as a residence for the sisters who administer the girls' hostel. But most impressively of all, a new parish church has been constructed, sharing many similarities with the church of its twin parish in Maple, On.

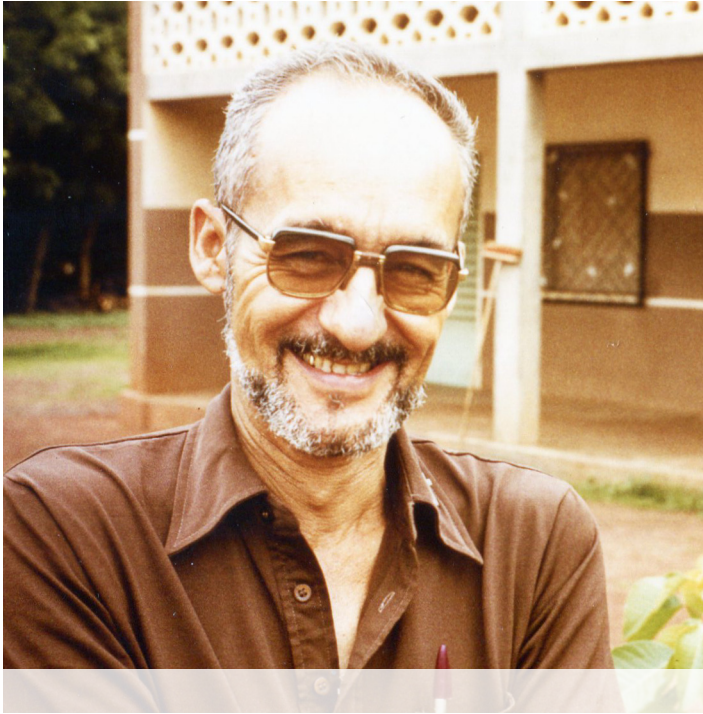
Since many new additions have been built at this once neglected parish, it is now in many ways the envy of Christians and non-Christians alike. Due to its vastness, it is difficult to traverse the rural areas in and around Tarapur which lacks the basic infrastructures for travel. Consequently, given this difficulty of travel, many parents have stopped sending their children to the school. If numbers at the school continue to drop, then the school will lose its charter.

Conclusion

The life and ministry of Bishop Swamy, then, is a window into the history of the Catholic Church in India and into the current challenges being faced by the Church. The struggles of the Catholic Church in India help us to understand the plight of many of our brothers and sisters around the world. It should make us aware of the prayerful and material support that Catholics need to prosper in many mission areas. It should also help us appreciate the freedom that we enjoy of practicing our faith in our country. Bishop Swamy has given his life to build the Catholic Church in his home country of India. He has gone out to minister to those in the margins of society in northern India. He has been sent by God to be a missionary in his own country.

The Missionary Life Of Fr. John Boos:

Arrival at Zaba! My First Evening!



{Beginning with this issue, Fr. John Boos, a missionary priest for fifty years, will send us periodic installments of his life as a missionary in Africa, as a White Father.}

ZABA! At last I had arrived! This little village of the Marka tribe in Upper Volta of West Africa would be my initial training-ground for the next six months, where I would start by learning the language and trying to understand the culture of the people among whom my missionary life would be spent.

But let me start at the beginning.

Born in Trinidad, West Indies, in 1937, I finished my Primary and Secondary schooling, taught in College for a short while, and after my father's death and my mother's subsequent re-marriage two years later, I became articled to a firm of Solicitors, and eventually found myself in England in 1962 to finish my Finals.

During this time, I came upon a large group of students in my students' hostel, many of them African, and, one thing leading to another, I decided to join the Missionaries of Africa after finishing my Law Degree, which was quite a jump! My Law Exams ended, so off I went for Philosophy in Ireland, the Novitiate in the UK, and finally Theology in France, the full 7-year Course of studies for the priesthood. In Trinidad I was ordained in 1970, and immediately was sent to Upper Volta – renamed Burkina Faso in 1994 – to start my missionary career, the fulfilment of my

dreams! This year 2020 marks my 50th as a missionary at large!

I arrived in the Mission house in Bobo Dioulasso in 1971, and apart from the ever-present 40-degree centigrade heat, I had to remark on the ferocity of the mosquitoes... Two days after my arrival a confrere drove me north, to Zaba. We arrived in the late evening, where there was a real welcome over a meal and cold beer, chilled in a fridge worked by kerosene! The three missionaries there were a mixed bunch. Two priests, a Canadian from Quebec, a Frenchman from Brittany, and a Brother from Switzerland. I supposed that God makes fire with all kinds of wood, but now He had to make do with a Trini! What fun He would have to have to weld us all together as a team! He had just six months to do His best! The evening continued with talk about my story, their work as missionaries, the village of Zaba, the language...

Beer and prayer-time ends, and I prepare for sleep on my little cot, surrounded by the conventional mosquito-net, 100% protection against mosquitos. But some skeeters are skinny, and can squirm through the normal ventilation holes. Others find the occasional larger hole in the net, and so my repose is interrupted continually by the high-pitched music of little wings... I cover my nose, to discourage them. To no avail, I stifle in the heat, and at last I submit to their feast, expose my undefended corpse to the humming feasters, hoping to get some rest. But in this I am mistaken. There are the bats.....

These have entered through the open windows, enticed by the swarms of mosquitos in the mission-house... Finally, exhaustion overcomes mere tiredness, I obey nature's call, as all must do.

At breakfast my confreres, who had already celebrated Mass for the village Catholics, are amused at my discomforts, but cheerily urge acceptance of country-side reality. There will be others to face, they assure me, and I take comfort in their cheerfulness, accompanied by a warm cup of coffee and a hunk of bread and cheese, with good talk. Indeed, there will be a lot to learn, I understand, and this is only the start. There's the heat to accept, the people to meet, the different foods and drink, the discomforts of lacking water from a tap, and then there's the main challenge – the Marka language to learn!

Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood: Project Report: MYANMAR

Diocese of Lashio - supporting Catholic education

Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood: The Association exists to meet the spiritual and material needs of all children so that they can live worthily as real children of God and to raise children's awareness of their neighbor's needs and teach them the value and power of solidarity and reciprocal support.

The country of Myanmar, formally known as Burma, is situated in southeast Asia. It has a population of approximately 54 million people, comprised of over one hundred ethnic groups. A former British colony, Myanmar gained its independence in 1948. In the 1960s, Myanmar became a military dictatorship. Much of its modern history has been marred with political unrest. Civil war has been raging in Myanmar for decades, as the many ethnic groups have found it difficult to establish a peaceful union. The government has been accused by various agencies, including the United Nations, with various human rights violations. The country has many refugee camps where ethnic groups, such as the Rohingya, have been forced to leave their traditional lands.

In the midst of this political unrest in Myanmar lies the Diocese of Lashio under the pastoral care of Bishop Philip Lasap Za Hawng. In the past few years, funds raised by the Canadian Holy Childhood Association have been donated to needy children in this diocese. Tens of thousands of dollars (\$32,000 in total) have been disbursed among the various boarding schools in the diocese



"Students of the Kut Kai Boarding School with their parish priest."

of Lashio. There are a number of boarding schools for boys. Some of these boarding schools for boys are run by the diocese. There are also boarding schools run by religious orders, such as the Salesians under the leadership of Fr. Bosco Ai lian'Htnag. Religious orders of sisters organize a number of boarding schools for girls. Sister Rita S. Hawng Tse, Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is one such example. The exact number of funds for each boarding school was determined by the number of students currently enrolled.

The funds were used to pay the tuition fees of the students whose parents would otherwise not be able to send them to these Catholic schools. These needy students also had all their other educational needs met, for instance uniforms, school supplies, and field trip fees. The physical needs of these students were also covered.



"Group photo of the students in residence at the Sacred Heart Sisters' Convent in Diocese of Lashio, Myanmar."

Their meals were provided, and, in case of illness, any medical expenses were also covered. The financial aid given to these boarding schools was also used to augment their religious studies curriculum. The schools were able to acquire religious programs and supplies that greatly enhanced the religious formation of the students.

The majority of the students who were assisted, according to Bishop Hawng, live in the refugee camps in Myanmar, some since 2011. Also, in the correspondence sent by Bishop Hawng, he indicates that these schools play a significant role in keeping the children safe. With the rampant social and economic unrest in Myanmar, children are prey for drug and sex traffickers. The schools keep children off the streets and the students are taught prayers in their religious instructions to be guarded against this

seedier side of life. A last reason to support these boarding schools is that it promotes religious vocations. Again, as Bishop Hawng explains, "Boarding houses under the care of priests and religious brothers and Sisters are the seed-beds of receiving religious instruction and initial formation for vocation to the priesthood and religious life and the future leaders of Church and the country."

The report from Myanmar concludes with this heart-felt expression of gratitude: "For this, we are so grateful to you and all our benefactors through you and always remembering you in our daily prayers." Please be assured that the funds that you may have donated for the needs of children through the Holy Childhood Association have had a great impact on the lives of many children in Myanmar. Please also note that the staff and children of these schools are praying for you.

Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood: Project Report: Fraser Lake B.C.

Below is a letter we received about the fundraising efforts of a youth group at St. Andrew's Church in Fraser Lake B.C. It is heartwarming to read the impact these fundraising efforts had on the young people who participated in this event. We wish to thank all those who participated in this fundraising event and to Kathleen and Mae Steiner in particular, for this inspirational example. Thank you to the Pastor and those who supported the efforts of the youth group as well.

St. Andrew's Catholic Church,
Box 580, Fraser Lake, BC V0J 1S0

March 9th, 2020

Dear Holy Childhood Association:

This year, our St. Andrew's Youth Group participated in our community's annual Snowflake Tea where we raffled baskets to fundraise for Eswatini. We had five baskets, two chocolate baskets, a house and home basket, a sweet treats from around the world basket, and a gingerbread creation. At the raffle, we raised \$892.25. Also, at the front of our church, we have a coin jar for Holy Childhood, and we raised \$587.40. Altogether we raised \$1479.65. People in our community are always very generous, especially when they learn what we are fundraising for. Our youth group enjoyed learning about Eswatini and journeying with the people of Eswatini through prayer. We look forward to learning, praying, and sharing with the next country in need.

Enclosed is the money order for \$1479.65. We hope that this can help contribute to helping the poor children around the world.

Sincerely,

Kathleen and Mae Steiner

On behalf St. Andrew's Youth



A picture of Kathleen and Mae Steiner, members of the St. Andrew's Youth Group, who spearheaded the efforts to raise funds for the HCA.

Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis, “Querida Amazonia”, 12.02.2020

In the fall of 2019, a synod on the Pan-Amazonian region was held at Vatican City. The three-week special assembly concluded on October 27, 2019. The synod focused on the theme, “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology.”

On February 12, 2020, just as the world was beginning to learn of a new virus that would turn into a global pandemic, Pope Francis issued his response to this synod on the Amazon, titled “Querida Amazonia.” Not much attention has been given to this document due to the impact of COVID-19. But this document merits a greater hearing.

The document traces new paths of evangelization and care for the environment and the poor. Pope Francis hopes for a new missionary thrust, and encourages the role of the laity within the ecclesial community. In order to give this document the attention it deserves, there are below some quotes from the document itself. Given the significance of this document to the work of the missions, may these quotes inspire you to read the full text of the Pope’s synodal response and reflect on the importance of evangelization and the environment in the context of missionary work.

6. Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world, so that the Bride of Christ can take on a variety of faces that better manifest the inexhaustible riches of God’s grace. Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate.

48. The equilibrium of our planet also depends on the health of the Amazon region. Together with the biome of the Congo and Borneo, it contains a dazzling diversity of woodlands on which rain cycles, climate balance, and a great variety of living beings also depend. It serves as a great filter of carbon dioxide, which helps avoid the warming of the earth.

48. The interest of a few powerful industries should not be considered more important than the good of the Amazon region and of humanity as a whole.

57. God our Father, who created each being in the universe with infinite love, calls us to be his means for hearing the cry of the Amazon region. If we respond to this heartrending plea, it will become clear that the creatures of the Amazon region are not forgotten by our heavenly Father.

57. For all these reasons, we believers encounter in the Amazon region a theological locus, a space where God himself reveals himself and summons his sons and daughters.

62. Yet as Christians, we cannot set aside the call to faith that we have received from the Gospel. In our desire to struggle side by side with everyone, we are not ashamed of Jesus Christ. Those who have encountered him, those who live as his friends and identify with his message, must inevitably speak of him and bring to others his offer of new life: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

63. An authentic option for the poor and the abandoned, while motivating us to liberate them from material poverty and to defend their rights, also involves inviting them to a friendship with the Lord that can elevate and dignify them.

63. How sad it would be if they were to receive from us a body of teachings or a moral code, but not the great message of salvation, the missionary appeal that speaks to the heart and gives meaning to everything else in life.

67. Addressing indigenous peoples of America, he reminded them that “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not fully reflected upon, not faithfully lived”.[89] Cultural challenges invite the Church to maintain “a watchful and critical attitude”, while at the same time showing “confident attention”.[90]

68. We can see that it involves a double movement. On the one hand, a fruitful process takes place when the Gospel takes root in a given place, for “whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel”.[92] On the other hand, the Church herself undergoes a process of reception that enriches her with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown in that culture. In this way, “the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face”.[93] In the end, this means allowing and encouraging the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel to be preached “in categories proper to each culture, creating a new synthesis with that particular culture”.[94]

73. Certainly, we should esteem the indigenous mysticism that sees the interconnection and interdependence of the whole of creation, the mysticism of gratuitousness that loves life as a gift, the mysticism of a sacred wonder before nature and all its forms of life.

74. He is present in a glorious and mysterious way in the river, the trees, the fish and the wind, as the Lord who reigns in creation without ever losing his transfigured wounds, while in the Eucharist he takes up the elements of this world and confers on all things the meaning of the paschal gift.



82. The Second Vatican Council called for this effort to inculturate the liturgy among indigenous peoples;[119] over fifty years have passed and we still have far to go along these lines.[120]

83. On Sunday, “Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. [Nowadays] we tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity”.[121] healthy contemplative leisure

91. The Eucharist is also the great sacrament that signifies and realizes the Church’s unity.[134] It is celebrated “so that from being strangers, dispersed and indifferent to each another, we may become united, equals and friends”.[135] The one who presides at the Eucharist must foster communion, which is not just any unity,

but one that welcomes the abundant variety of gifts and charisms that the Spirit pours out upon the community.

94. For wherever there is a particular need, he has already poured out the charisms that can meet it. This requires the Church to be open to the Spirit’s boldness, to trust in, and concretely to permit, the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay.

99. This could happen because of the presence of strong and generous women who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries. For centuries, women have kept the Church alive in those places through their remarkable devotion and deep faith. Some of them, speaking at the Synod, moved us profoundly by their testimony.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-02/querida-amazonia-synthesis-pope-francis-exhortation-amazon.html>

“We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God”.

“We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God”.

In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.

Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana,

so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust. ...

Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer.

Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.

To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen

The Editor's Point of View



COVID-19 AND SUFFERING

As Catholics, we are called to suffer with Jesus. Suffering is given new meaning when we join our own sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus. Suffering becomes redemptive. During this COVID-19 pandemic, we are all suffering in some way, either

physically, psychologically, or financially. Today, we are keenly aware that our whole planet is suffering and that many may die because of this pandemic. Catholics would do well, therefore, to reflect on their own current sufferings in light of those of Jesus.

The suffering and death of Jesus should remind us that Jesus knows intimately what we are currently experiencing. Since Jesus suffered, he understands what we are experiencing during this pandemic. The uncertainty we are feeling was also felt by Jesus. The worry and anxiety that we are carrying was equally borne by Jesus. The loneliness that we sense was also sensed by Jesus. The tears that we are shedding were equally shed by Jesus.

Since Jesus underwent what we are feeling, we can therefore be sure that Jesus is suffering with us during this pandemic. Jesus worries with us when we worry and cries with us when we are uncertain as to what the future holds. We can be certain that we have a saviour who can sympathize with us in these difficult times. We can come before Jesus with all our pain, fear, and anxiety and Jesus will have a sympathetic ear, and will give us a shoulder on which to cry, all because he went through it all himself.

Prayer can be one way that we let out the various emotions that we are feeling but do not know how to process. In prayer, we know that we will be greeted with understanding and love. With the extra time that many of us now have, let us spend some of it in prayer with Jesus whose suffering is a reminder to us that suffering can be endured and conquered. During this pandemic, sharing our sufferings in prayer is one way that we can carry the cross with Jesus and join the sufferings that we now face with those of Jesus.

COVID-19 AND REASSESSING OUR LIVES

One of the challenges that we face during this pandemic is that it brings us face-to-face with our own mortality. We tend to go through life denying that we will die one day, which is essentially healthy. We should not obsess over death. But with this pandemic, we are constantly reminded that death is a part of life.

These difficult times, which remind us of our own mortality, however, has its benefits. Coming face-to-face with our own mortality often makes us re-evaluate our lives and helps us to see what

is truly important in life. In this time of uncertainty, we can make a more in-depth examination of what is truly meaningful in life and what actually makes life worth living. During this time of physical distancing, we would be wise to spend some time on self-evaluation and self-reflection. We can analyze our lives prior to the pandemic for those attitudes and behaviours that made a positive impact on our wellbeing and which ones can be eliminated due to their destructive qualities. And hopefully we can bring these lessons that we are learning into our lives, especially when we return to something resembling normal.

As a result of the pandemic, we have been brought closer together, as families, as communities, as citizens of the world. During these trying times, we are more conscious of looking after each other, supporting the sick and the elderly, and conscious of the suffering that is occurring throughout the world. In this time, we have turned our attention more intently to those in need and may this focus on the suffering of others continue even when the pandemic is over.

During the pandemic, we have more time to prayer and reflect. Unlike the days preceding the pandemic, where because of all our responsibilities, we found it difficult to find time to pray, we have been given the gift of more quiet and restful time. But with this extra time that we have, let us make good use of it and practice spending quality moments with our God. Hopefully, when our hectic lives return, we will have developed a routine of prayer which we will want to continue.

Another interesting by-product of this pandemic is that we have been given the time to rest. At least the hectic pace that was a characteristic of most of our lives has slowed down. Finally, many of us can practice self-care. May we begin to value these quieter moments in our lives and strive to incorporate them as a regular routine even into the post-pandemic period.

These are only a few of the insights that we may have gained during this pandemic. Let us pray, however, that we may discover what is truly important in life and that we may learn well the lessons that we have been taught in these trying times.

COVID 19 AND HOPE

As Christians, we are an Easter people. We believe that sin and death do not have the last word, but life and love do. We hold firm to the belief in the triumph of life over death and love over sin because Jesus rose from the dead. The foundation of the Christian faith stands on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Even though Jesus suffered on Good Friday, he rose again on Easter Sunday and this paschal mystery is what sustains Christians in this life and gives them hope. While we will all experience sufferings of various kinds, we know that we can overcome all adversity because of what transpired on that first Easter morning.

In Remembrance

Our Deceased Donors

Please remember in your prayers the recently deceased members of the Pontifical Mission Societies:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Androvich, Joy..... | Elgin, On | Brother, Paul | Victoria, Bc |
| Cain, Camilla | Marmora, On | Rakoz, Bertha..... | Camrose, Ab |
| Daoust, John | Prince Albert, Sk | Reynders, Martin | Osoyoos, Bc |
| Hompoth, Louis A. | Regina, Sk | Richard, Robert J. | Edmonton, Ab |
| Joson, Lourdes..... | Brampton, On | Shea, John B. | North York, On |
| Father, Mcdonald, Dennis F. | Calgary, Ab | Stevenson, Dorothe | Comox, Bc |
| Mckenna, Margaret | Newcastle, On | Trebish, Gloria..... | Regina, Sk |
| Neely, Therese..... | Sarnia, On | Young, Doreen..... | Richmond, Bc |

Since the resurrection of Jesus has conquered evil and life reigns supreme, as Christians, we can have hope that we will overcome this pandemic. As Christians, we do not deny the reality that we can be infected with the COVID-19 virus. We do not deny that even our loved ones could die from the virus. We accept that the virus could negatively impact our lives in any number of different ways. Given the potential for harm that this virus has, we take every precaution and follow as closely as possible the advice of medical experts and government officials. This virus is a threat to our well-being, and we take every measure we can to protect ourselves.

But even as we recognize the perils of this pandemic, we do so with hope. Our hope springs, not from wishful thinking. It is founded on our faith. Our hope stems from the resurrection of Jesus. Just as God assisted Jesus through every stage of his suffering and death, we can be sure that God will be with us as well. He will give us the courage and strength to deal with this pandemic in a responsible and effective manner. God will help us overcome this pandemic as he made Jesus rise from the dead.

Christian hope is founded not only on our belief in a loving and providential God, it is also a result of our faith in scripture. In our sacred texts, God has promised us his everlasting mercy and so we hold firm to what has been promised to us in God's Word. Our hope is also based on the ultimate goodness of God's creatures. We human beings were created by God from love and for love. While we human beings can mess up this world pretty badly sometimes, in the end, even the original goodness within human beings will triumph. Certainly, in times of crisis, we humans tend to rise to the occasion. During this pandemic, we have seen all sorts of generous acts of kindness and the medical community selflessly risking their lives so that others may live. We can hope as Christians because it will be this sort of selflessness that will conquer all, even a pandemic.

As we live through this pandemic, then, it will only be natural for us to experience worry and anxiety. It is only natural to become impatient in the face of so many uncertainties. As Christians, however, we should never let these emotions quench the hope that is within us. Our hope resides in a loving Creator, a risen Saviour, and omnipresent Spirit. Or as St. Paul would say, "With God on our side, who can be against us?" (1Corinthians 8: 31)



(This special prayer that follows is intended to be said while praying the Rosary in the month of May to ask for assistance from our Mother during the pandemic.)

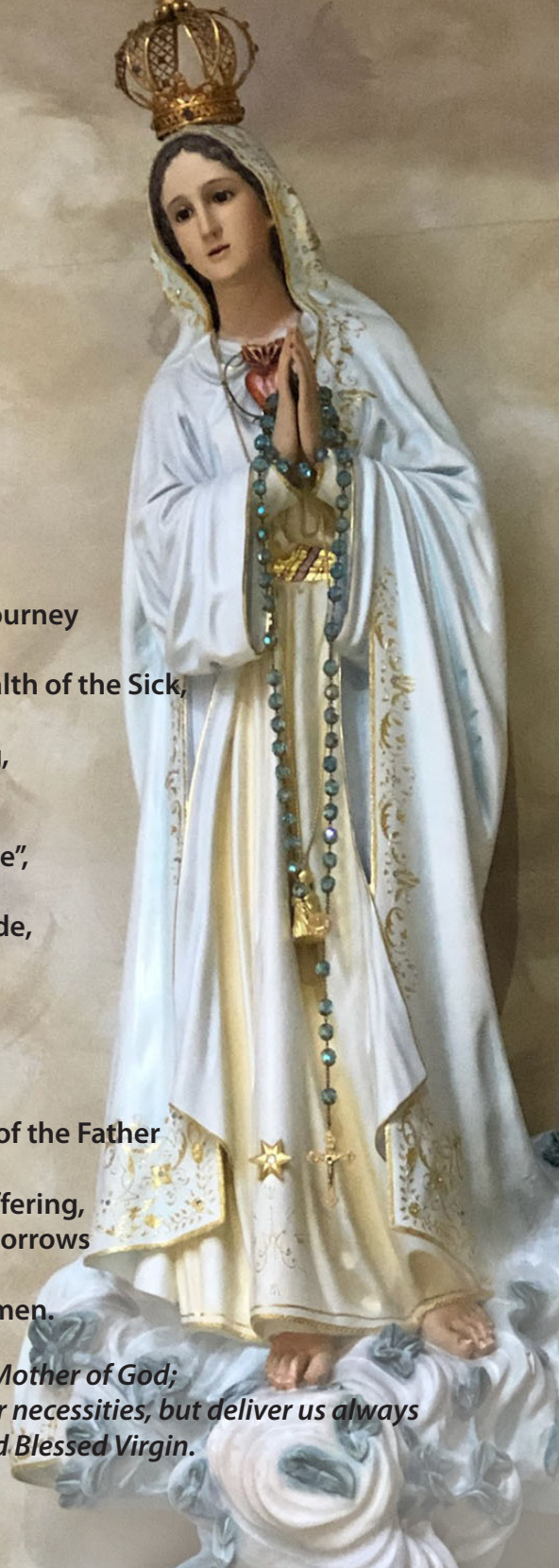
O Mary,
You shine continuously on our journey
as a sign of salvation and hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who, at the foot of the cross,
were united with Jesus' suffering,
and persevered in your faith.

"Protectress of the Roman people",
you know our needs,
and we know that you will provide,
so that, as at Cana in Galilee,
joy and celebration may return
after this time of trial.

Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform ourselves to the will of the Father
and to do what Jesus tells us.
For he took upon himself our suffering,
and burdened himself with our sorrows
to bring us, through the cross,
to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen.

*We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God;
Do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always
from every danger, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin.*

Amen



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