

E-BULLETIN #111

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 209

Pallotti to Peru!

opening of a Pallottine mission in archdiocese of Ayacucho



On February 21 we met in Lima, Peru: the General Father, the Provincial Fathers Sticco and Fadul, Fr Tomy and Sister Chandrika. There was no flight to Ayacucho in the same day, so we stayed in the hotel annexed to the airport.

On February 23, early Sunday morning, we started on our journey to Vilcas Huaman. Fr Manoel and Fr Edvan drove the parish's car to get accustomed to the mountain roads of Peru. The Chancellor of the Archdiocese, Fr Percy, accompanied them on the same vehicle.

The arrival on Vilcas Huaman was a real feast. The children of the John Paul II House made the reception with songs and flowers. There was a procession through the central square till the church entrance.

In front of the church entrance, two girls dressed in Inca's costumes welcomed the missionaries, as if they wished to say: our culture receive your culture.



The church was all adorned with fruit and flowers to the feast.



The *Mass of Possession* was celebrated for the missionaries who received the title of "Solidary Vicars". The representative of Monsignor [Bishop] Salvador celebrated the Mass with General Father and the Provincial Fathers of USA and Brazil; the Founder of the congregation of the sisters who, in the future, will work in this mission; the sisters



who currently work in Vichongo and Vilcas Huaman; and all the people of the community.

Going back to Huamanga, Ayacucho, we visited two monasteries of cloistered sisters. The Monastery of the Clare Sisters and the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites, who assured us the commitment of their prayers for the success of our mission.

Finally, in Lima, February 26, before our return, we visited the altar where they have the relics of Santa Rosa de Lima and the Peruvian Saints in the Monastery of the Dominicans, where we asked for their strong intercessions.

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item 210

Myanmar investigation

Responding to our General's inspiration, and a subsequent directive from our Jan 2013 AU Regional Assembly to 'find ways to respond to the Rector General's challenge for our Region to embrace a missionary thrust', I flew to Myanmar (formerly Burma) with Salesian **Br Michael Lynch sdb**, to test the waters.

Fr Jacob had earlier warned us that without a missionary focus *Regina Mundi Region* will continue to decline. Interestingly only days before his election an identical observation was made by then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in warning against a 'self-referential church', 'a worldly church, living within herself, of herself, for herself'. He told the Cardinals before the start of the conclave that, 'when the Church does not come out of herself to evangelise, she becomes self-referential and then gets sick'. According to Cardinal Bergoglio, if the Church is to remain healthy it has to be constantly reaching out beyond itself. Since becoming Pope he has continually challenged us to come out of ourselves, to go to the peripheries - both to the geographical as well as the existential peripheries 'of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery'.



Encouraged by these words, Fr Jacob suggested at the Asia Oceania meeting in April '13 that we look at either Vietnam or Myanmar for our missionary thrust. Being an ethnic Burmese I naturally started investigating the situation in Myanmar. I had preliminary talks with Archbishop Charles Bo of Yangon (Rangoon) during a visit to Melbourne. He encouraged us to come and see for ourselves. So when the possibility arose for me to accompany Michael Lynch sdb to Myanmar I jumped at the opportunity.

While in Myanmar I stayed with Salesian communities in Yangon, Mandalay and Anisakan. But at Myitkyina, a small city about 190 kms north of Bhamo where I was born, we had to stay in a hotel due to government restrictions. The Salesian community in Myitkyina has a refugee camp located on their property, where there are 350 residents displaced by the conflict between government troops and insurgents.

Although I was less than two hundred kilometres away from my hometown of Bhamo, because meetings were taking place between the government and the Kachin insurgents in that town, I wasn't able to visit. Nevertheless this gave me the opportunity to spend a day at each of two refugee camps in Myitkyina. One camp was located on the Salesian farm and the other on the grounds of the diocesan church property.

Their Provincial in Myanmar, Fr Maurice Vallence sdb, was very encouraging. He considered that the time is ripe for the Pallottines to establish a foothold in Myanmar. He advised there are plans for a new highway to be constructed between Myanmar and India through the Kalay Diocese and his advice was to get in early and purchase a property in close proximity to where the highway will be built with a view to having a place of worship for the growing population. Interestingly, just on the other side of the border, lies Arunachal Pradesh where members from Prabhu Prakash Province are ministering to hill tribes.

To purchase land for a mission in Myanmar has its share of risks since the government will not allow us to hold the title deeds of the land. Therefore it becomes imperative to carry out a thorough investigation of the rules and regulations before embarking on such a project.

There is no doubt that the Church is growing in Myanmar, especially in the rural areas among the ethnic tribes. Back 40 years ago there were equal numbers of Catholics in Myanmar and in Thailand, about 350,000. Today, the number of Catholics in Thailand remains the same but in Myanmar the numbers have doubled to about 800,000.

While in Anisakan I had an opportunity to meet with Bishop Philip Za Hawng of Lasho Diocese who coincidentally knew my parents. His diocese borders China and, although he would be very happy to have a Pallottine presence, he admitted that there are not too many Catholics or too many baptisms in his diocese.



In the 43 or so years since I left Myanmar many changes have taken place in the country. It is now more open to the outside world; there is no longer any bribery or corruption (at least not overtly); and there are fewer travel restrictions and more freedom of speech. But there is still much room for improvement. Poverty is prevalent. Drug abuse is rampant among young people especially in the northern States and human trafficking is a huge problem.

In Yangon I spent some time in a parish recently placed in the care of the Salesians. Fr Andrew, a young priest in his thirties, is the parish priest of this urban sprawl. His parishioners are very poor and a tin shed (see photo) is his abode most days of the week. On the other days he goes and stays with the Salesian community at their Provincialate.

I was greatly impressed by the calibre of these young Salesian priests and seminarians. Their dedication and enthusiasm in the service of God is infectious. I was greatly humbled by the attitude of the ordinary people and was awestruck by their joyfulness in spite of enormous poverty and suffering they endure daily.

This is fertile land ready for the 'sowers'. I feel the harvest will be rich if we are willing to put our shoulders to the plough. The time may not be immediate. The current government's policy of limiting working and tourist visas to 10 weeks duration is a stumbling block for us. I spoke with 2 Columban sisters (one Irish and one Korean) running a hospice for HIV patients in Myitkyina who have to leave the county every 10 weeks to renew their visas.



Although restrictions, on visas and land ownership, create an obstacle we are hopeful that, with ongoing relaxation of regulations in Myanmar, we can begin missionary work there in the near future. In the meantime let us be vigilant in our prayers for the success of this mission.

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05.02.14
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you commented...

on #110 Thanks for another interesting newsletter...good to read about the Caribbean, about which I'm afraid to say I know very little - and even less about the Pallottine presence there.

MB 09.03.14

It gives me great joy to witness the growth of our electronic bulletin into a global communication network in our Pallottine family. Lately it has been bringing out valuable information about the Pallottine presence in different corners of the world. Our Pallottine Family is much bigger than what we would normally imagine. What is lacking is information accessible to ordinary members around the world. Congrats and thanks to our missionaries in Ukraine and Central America who work with extraordinary missionary zeal in very difficult situations. Such Catholic missions are not merely something of the past that we could read in the books. I do believe that the zeal, courage and commitment of the missionaries to live the missionary mandate to such a radical level is precisely what maintains the youthfulness of the Spirit in the Church.

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