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The word of the superior general

The challenge of belonging to a religious family

"What should encourage us, when we sacrifice family affections, is that God takes care of everything and arranges everything perfectly when he is obeyed: the best means to be useful to God and his loved ones, It is offering oneself the sacrifice of what we love most, like Abraham."

(SMG) (DS 290)

Dear Betharramites:

In this editorial for the month of May, I would like to share some experiences related to our sense of belonging to a religious family. There are many reasons that make us feel part of this family: our vocational history, our numerous ecclesial models, our attraction to a certain Face of Christ, the call to mission that makes us: volunteers, available, servants, auxiliaries.

The founding Father told us: "We...belong to a community whose origin, purpose and ministries are quite sublime; a community that came to be formed despite our feeble selves – I mean that despite all the obstacles that we put up with, and that we continue to put up with in many ways

– a community that finds itself in very intimate circumstances before God, the Church and itself " (Spiritual Doctrine 243)

Contemplating with a steadfast gaze and affection St Michael Garicoits, Fr Augusto Etchecopar and so many other authentic Betharramites, has always helped me to form myself like them - even with my fragilities and sins - enchanted by their way of loving and feeling for the Congregation. "even giving one's life for it." Leaving them as just pictures on a wall would distance me from the ideal of life that God has pointed out to me.

In our communities there are small 'living Garicoits and Etchecopars'... we must discover them, because they are a treasure for the family and build bonds from affection and the testimony of life.

In the Generalate in Rome, as you climb the stairs, you see paintings with the photos of the fourteen superior Generals, starting with our good and venerated founder. When I climb those steps, sometimes, I feel a little "watched" by them and I wonder...: "Gustavo, what are you doing for Betharram?"... What are you giving to the Betharramite family?... What is she giving you?...

These are questions that each of us could ask ourselves, beyond our ordinary mission, there is a dimension that is not foreign to any of us and that has to do with our belonging to a specific religious family in the Church. Our family has given us so much...: a name, a formation, a consecration within it, a mission.

The answers, born from our experience, will make us feel similar or different, but at the same time valuable, living stones of the same religious family. We Betharramites have many personal gifts to offer and we do not walk alone. Although some may feel somewhat isolated, hurt or disillusioned at times, being "part of Betharram" tells us that there will always be a "mysterious Pilgrim" at our side who will encourage us to reach the expected goal: be it our brother or sister, layman. or religious.

Our family, like others in the Church today, is at a crucial moment in its history. The trials it goes through are no less than the great trials of the beginnings: we have great structures and few members; several sick and elderly brothers; a fragile testimony of religious life; a recent history that sometimes makes us proud and other times scourges us; lay people who ask us for answers to life's questions and

see daily our growing fragility, both in number and quality of life; We are surprised by the unexpected crises of perseverance in vocations; pastoral individualism (a great scourge today in religious life...); the economic and administrative problems caused by a materialistic and complex world to which we sometimes adapt...; the lack of animation in the Regions needed to strengthen peace and communion in some communities; the recklessness that is easily unleashed in the world of social networks, etc.

With all this panorama it seems that it is not a pleasure to be a Betharramite religious...Where then to place our hope? Saint Michael tells us that: "We should never hope more (in God) than when everything seems lost!"

That is why we trust, even though we live surrounded by trials, we continue to make a pilgrimage in hope. The true life that Jesus taught us continues to develop silently in the hiddenness of "the position", just as Saint Michael taught us. That Cross that is given to us "piecemeal" in the place where we ought to be (and not where we feel comfortable...).

By the grace of God, several young people still want to be part of this pilgrimage (especially in Asia, Africa and South America), and they join our communities in mission along the way, placing their trust in us because they still recognize us as "Family." . They do not seem to care about those weaknesses cited, because Jesus' call to follow him goes beyond the vision of those who open the doors of a community in mission or a house of formation.

A vocation has always been a calling that touches the heart and implies "falling in love", and they accept "the family of their lover" just as it is...

We then have a call to take care of our sense of belonging to Betharram. If we are not emotionally and effectively united to the religious family, how will we help these young people and Betharramite lay people to realize their vocational dream?

This sense of belonging is the subjective identification that an individual experiences with respect to a community in mission, where they feel comfortable, welcomed and accepted, that is, where they feel they belong. It has to do, then, with the affective dimension that we grow freely in the experience of becoming Betharramites.

That is why it is not enough simply to be in the family, we also have to want to belong to it. Being Betharramites is a consequence of a deep spiritual experience in which: we appropriate all that our transcendent God offers us in Jesus Christ, his Son, and we strip ourselves of self, for love of his Kingdom.

I end with some familiar verses, which should not sound like a reproach but rather a loving call from our mother, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram:

“I know that you have perseverance and that you have suffered a lot for my Name without flagging. But I must reproach you for having let the love you had at the beginning grow cold” (Rev 2.3-4)

May God bless us all, under the gaze of Mary and Saint Michael!!

Fr. Gustavo Agín scj
Superior General

QUESTIONS TO SHARE:

- 1) *. At what point in my life as a Betharramite did I feel most united to the Betharram family? Why was this?*
2. *What has the Congregation given to me?*
- 3) *What do I give to the Congregation?*

Ascension of the Lord, Homily of May 9th, 2024

consignment and reading of the bull of indiction for the jubilee 2025 and second vespers



[...] The Ascension of the Lord is not his separation or removal from us, but rather the fulfilment of his mission. Jesus first descended to us, so that we might ascend to the Father. He came down to us in order to raise us on high. He descended even to the depths of the earth, so that the gates of heaven might open wide above us. He destroyed our death, that we might receive life, forever.

This is the basis of our hope. Christ, in ascending to heaven, brings to the very heart of God our humanity, with all its hopes and expectations, so that that "we, his members, might be confident of following where he, our Head and Founder, has gone before" (Preface I of the Ascension of the Lord).

Brothers and sisters, it is this hope, based on Christ who died and rose again, that we wish to celebrate, ponder and proclaim to the whole world in the coming Jubilee, which is almost upon us. This hope has nothing to do with mere "human" optimism or the ephemeral expectation of some earthly benefit. No, it is something real, already accomplished in Christ, a gift daily bestowed upon us until the time when we will be one in the embrace of his love. Christian hope – as Saint Peter writes – is "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Pet 1:4). Christian hope sustains the

journey of our lives, even when the road ahead seems winding and exhausting. It opens our eyes to future possibilities whenever resignation or pessimism attempt to imprison us. It makes us see the promise of good at times when evil seems to prevail. Christian hope fills us with serenity when our hearts are burdened by sin and failure. It makes us dream of a new humanity and gives us courage in our efforts to build a fraternal and peaceful world, even when it seems barely worth the effort. Such is hope, the gift that the Lord bestowed on us in Baptism.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this Year of Prayer, as we prepare for the celebration of the Jubilee, let us lift up our hearts to Christ, and become singers of hope in a culture marked by much despair. By our actions, our words, the decisions we make each day, our patient efforts to sow seeds of beauty and kindness wherever we find ourselves, we want to sing of hope, so that its melody can touch the heartstrings of humanity and reawaken in every heart the joy and the courage to embrace life to the full. [...]

Brothers and sisters, may the Lord, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, grant us the grace to rediscover hope, to proclaim hope and to build hope. ■



Identity & charism

the face of Saint Michael today
in religious and laity



Betharramite... in the flow of life

| Fr. Giancarlo Monzani scj

This year, I celebrate 60 years of religious life, and I could never thank Fr. Michael enough for welcoming me into this great Betharram family and for teaching me how to live my religious and priestly vocation through the 'Here I am.'

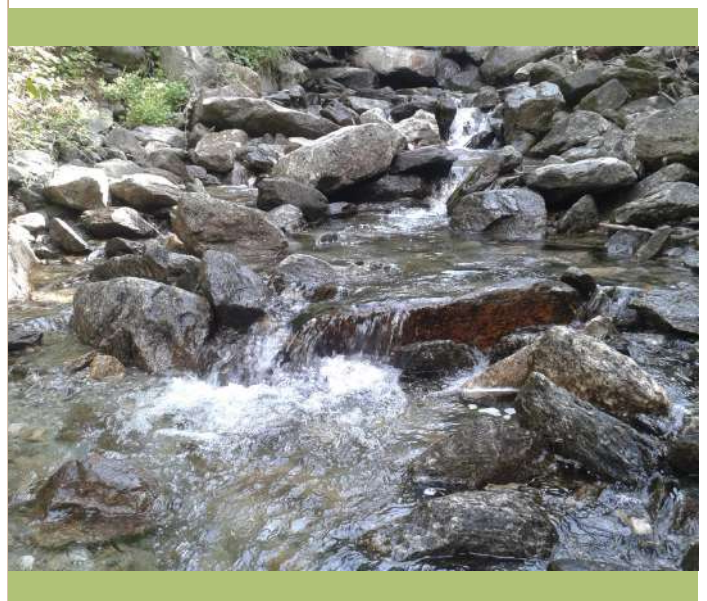
My story is known to many: Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Atlántida, Sauce, Montevideo, Santiago del Estero, Beltrán... But what I have experienced internally, only God knows.

Detachment is a beautiful word, but it comes with its share of sacrifice. Leaving family, abandoning the homes where one has built a nest, and starting new relationships were not easy. However, prayer and surrendering to God led me to say, 'Thy will be done.'

Life in community is a great gift from the Lord; I do not like being alone. But sometimes, due to my nature, disagreements arise with my

fellow brothers. When this happens, it becomes challenging to pray together, eat together, and participate in community meetings while feeling deep in my conscience the words of Saint Michael: 'Bring joy to your brother.'

And so, I humbly asked God for the grace of reconciliation. Pastoral ministry is another significant reality:



God says in Genesis that we must earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. And Jesus adds: 'Go and evangelize.' I tried to give myself wholeheartedly, even if it meant sacrificing some prayer time.

Now, as I have grown older, the anticipation of the definitive encounter with the Father in heaven marks my

steps. The desire to dwell in the temple and be, like Jesus, the way to heaven for my people fills my heart. 'How much You have loved me, my God, and how much You have done for me to love You.' The time has come to transform the iceberg of my heart into fire, salt, and light for the earth. ■



God makes us happy with His happiness

| Fr. Jacob Biso Puliampally scj

According to me the charisma of our Congregation could be better understood and lived, if we answer to three questions. They are; firstly, what is the end or goal of our charisma? Secondly, what are the means to reach the end or goal? Thirdly, what does the charisma of the congregation give me personally

The first question's answer is that, we are called to be the co-operators with Jesus for the salvation of the souls. It is very much connected with John: 3: 16 which says "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. The second question's answer is so beautiful. Jesus achieved God

the Father's goal through humility and love. Therefore the means are humility and love. Philippians 2:6-8 though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Our charisma even says how to do it that is; saying 'Here I am' continually without any hesitation. Finally what does it give me personally? As answer to this question I like to quote the words of St. Michael Garicoits our founder, "God makes us happy with His happiness."

I personally experienced it



Saint Joseph's interregional novitiate: the community of Bethlehem welcomed the three Thai novices (first year): Paya Daniel Rattanachai, Rommaikajee Luke Piyapol, Jamo Paul Athit with Fr. Jacob, Fr. Gaspar and Fr. Stervin, Master of novices.

in my life. After my ordination I took a promise and put all my effort to be faithful to my call. My main focus was to say 'yes' to my superiors, especially in the matter of appointments. I even told my superiors, "please do not ask me can you go to a place? But only say to me you are appointed and go for this mission." I never said any of my superiors, 'no' whenever I received my appointments. I pondered on the charisma of our congregation and God always made me happy with His happiness. My present stay at Bethlehem is joyful because of my saying 'Yes Here I am' without falling into any temptation.

When war broke out between Israel and Palestine, I had the temptation to say no to the

Bethlehem mission. When some clergy threw very discouraging and fearsome statements on me, I had the temptation to say no to the mission. Some of the painful and fearsome statements actually helped me to be humble and to love the mission; above all to be faithful to the charisma. Life lies ahead of me as a sea, far and deep. I hope the charisma that gives me internal bliss will always give light to my foot steps to go ahead, as Saint Michael Garicoits said "Forward always Forward".





My joy of being in the Central African Republic

| Fr. Valentin N. N'Zoré scj

Just as the *Etincelle* departed from Bayonne in 1856, carrying the first missionaries to Latin America, I left Abidjan on Thursday, 5 October 5 2023, for the Central African Republic (CAR), after five years spent in Dabakala. After those years in pastoral ministry in villages, braving rain and storms, the Congregation appointed me to a different reality with a new challenge. I rejoiced at this new appointment; for I did not come to Bétharram to do my will, but to do the will of God, spoken to me through my superiors.

With a heart full of joy like a child obeying his father, I unpacked my suitcase in Bimbo on the outskirts of Bangui, the capital of the CAR. My first impression was the warm welcome I received from my community superior and parish priest, Father Beniamino Gusmeroli, who came to pick me up at Bangui

airport. Once in the community, we sat down to share a midday meal, together with the young people to whom I had been appointed as trainer.

Next, he offered me his full availability in case of I should need it. This truly surprised and moved me, coming from an elder. After this openness towards my humble self, I placed myself in a position of obedience to the superior, whom I consult in all my decision-making.

As for the mission, the decree appointing me to Bimbo clearly indicated that I am in Bimbo as a trainer of pre-postulants and as vicar at the Parish of Our Lady of



the Visitation. So right away, I got to work. First, in collaboration with my superior, I began learning Sango to be more effective in fulfilling the mission. Father Beniamino promptly found me a tutor.

With God's grace, I started presiding over the Eucharistic celebration in Sango during the week. Regarding formation, I am the master of pre-postulants and the secretary of the Interreligious Propaedeutic Seminary of Saint Peter Claver in Bimbo, where I also conduct sessions on non-violent communication and on an introduction to the Bible.

In fact, I strive to give the best of myself, to present a good image of the spirituality and charism of the Bétharramite, "Here I am" in Bimbo, spreading the same happiness around me that I have experienced since joining the community.

Apart from what I have already mentioned above, I sometimes lead sessions at the Inter-diocesan Seminary of Saint Mark in Bimbo, and in certain religious communities in the city, which combine philosophy and theology.

Frankly, I am never idle in Bimbo, and I am filled with

a great assurance, to the extent that sometimes I wonder where this strength comes from, because through the instrument that I am, God performs wonders. With the approval of the parish priest, I sometimes intervene to provide teachings to diocesan and parish groups that request them.

What positively strikes me here is the large number of Christian faithful, with a vast majority being young people, which is very different from Dabakala where I come from, their simplicity of life, and the simplicity with which our fraternal life is also lived in the community and in the parish.

But alongside all these joys, there is no lack of difficulties beyond the community: electricity shortages, the heat. There was also the issue of transportation, but since the first week of April 2024, this is now only a distant memory; because the Vicariate has



made available to the community an all-terrain vehicle to better fulfil the mission. I take advantage of this blessing to thank the Bétharramite religious of the CAR who welcomed me very well, and to the benefactors who provided the vehicle.

The challenges are numerous, and I am aware of them; but without any pretension, I will try in all humility and with the grace of God to accomplish what I can. A very special thanks to my superior and parish priest, Father

Beniamino, who spares no effort to see me and ensure that I am happy.

With the appointment of Father Marie Paulin Yarkaï in Bimbo, our team is at its best. Thanks to our superiors who encourage me in this Central African mission.

To live up to this mission, I surrender myself into the arms of providence through the intercession of Our Lady of Betharram. ■



Witnessing the happiness and the smile in living together with joy and love

| Fr. Bithu Pitak scj

It has been 161 years since St Michael witnessed to the charism through his exemplary life and teaching. Time has passed but this precious heritage is still worth reflection and study. Above all, I must say that our Betharramite charism is never out of date and it always nourishes the fragrance of our religious life.

We live in a world today, where there are so many things happening and changing. I strongly believe that having a deep root in our charism greatly helps us remain steady and go forward confidently. Though to embody the charism of St Michael in our lives and make it clear with our

actions, is a challenge, it definitely repays the effort to have a close look at the life of St Michael as our model and observe how he lived his life. The text in the act of 28th General Chapter clearly states that our reason for being, 'is to reproduce and manifest the impulse of the heart of Jesus'. (Rule of Life n.2) The charism of Betharram is par excellence a charism of openness: from the movement of the incarnation to the wound of Calvary. It begins with a strong response: Here I am, out of love. (Page 69)

I am pleased to say that the dedicated lives of missionaries in Thailand from the beginning until



now has had a great impact on me and influenced my motivation to say, 'Here I am, to God'. Their simple lives brought a wonderful inspiration to live as God wants us to live. Their availability and commitment helped create a spirit of self-denial and a willingness to leave everything behind and to follow Jesus, the master. Their obedience to God through their superiors was so great that renounced themselves and started a new journey in a foreign land. Consequently, their actions could be examples for us in living the charism of St Michael, passing on its identity and making it real in our daily life. Their faithful lives produced much fruit in bringing people to God and inspiring the young to do the same, as priests, religious men and women and lay people too. In truth, their effort and endeavour must be always remembered and rewarded by God's graciousness.

In addition, to give you a clue

to where I am living now, let me introduce it to you: The Nottingham community consists of four members, two members are from England and the other two are from India and Thailand respectively.

We serve two

parishes, two schools and some other pastoral activities. There is also great richness in the multicultural backgrounds of people in the community where I serve. I witness the happiness and the smile in living together with joy and love, the commitment in sharing the good news to all and the readiness of the members to serve and be available to the needs of the local church. This fact really appears in the community life as well. It is not just what we proclaim by words but by every action we are involved in. This promptness implies that the charism of St Michael influenced our action to imitate the Heart of our Lord Jesus, saying, 'Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will'. This witness can answer and make our presence visible in today's life.

Honestly, we do not need great theories in order to live our charism, but simply our true identity, 'Here I am, out of love'. But we cannot

always claim to achieve this virtue with perfection. We have another side to consider: our fragility and our failures in living our charism with great love. We sincerely admit our lack of perfection in everything, but we aim for perfection with our great effort and sacrifice. This is always a great opportunity for me to return to our Betharramite roots, to renew my religious life and learn again to live as a Betharramite.

I was greatly impressed with the topic 'Be opened' because it allows me to reflect on the mystery of the incarnation, reaching out to others to share the love of the Heart of Jesus. The charism of Betharram is in itself a charism of opening: 'Here I am, out of love' and it is a treasure for today's world. (Article 33, Page 73). It is the first step in letting the Holy Spirit and the power of God work within us, opening up ourselves and guiding us all the way through our life journey. This reminds me that opening up myself to God is an

important factor in serving him. It also urges me to do the same for my brothers and sisters in their service. It is a challenge to share this charism with others outside the community rather than just in the community itself. But there is no judgmental aspect relating to this unrealised fact. Hence, fraternal life is the foundation of our missionary outreach. A good visible common life keeps us rooted in our humanity and makes our witness credible and visible. (Article 59, Page 76). However, our virtue must shine, so others can see what we really are in the face of today's world, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven' (Mt 5:16).

Let us always keep walking ahead, make our best in everything and God will take care of the rest. ■



Living the charism in the workplace

| Br. Emile Garat scj

It will be 33 years since I became a Religious Brother. This call to experience the world of work is not

something recent, as during my studies at the seminary, I underwent a year of plumbing training followed

by nine months of work in a shopping centre in Bordeaux, where I lived in community with Father Jean Couret, himself a Religious-Priest Worker. He was my first witness to the world of work. After being a chaplain for vocational and technical colleges for years, and accompanying the Young Christian Workers, this call to the world of work resonated with me through our Pope Francis' call to go to the peripheries. It has been 4 years and 4 months since I started working in a small E Leclerc supermarket as a cashier in the store and at the service station. I have a 35-hour contract. I work in a team of mostly female cashiers from Monday to Saturday inclusive, with 2 days off per week, which vary from week to week. This work is for me a team effort, where we encourage and respect each other even in difficult moments. It's a world with a high turnover, and you always have to adapt because that's the current world; people don't stay in the same company all their lives.

Living the Betharramite charism in my cashier job means staying within the boundaries of my role, which is to serve the customer with three keywords (hello, thank you, goodbye)

I go to work with pleasure because it is a place of encounter, where the person is at the centre of my life as a man and as a religious, as much as my hierarchy, my colleagues, and the customers.

- efficiently regardless of the rush. I maintain a good relationship with customers and colleagues. All my colleagues know that I am a Religious Brother, and it hasn't had a negative impact on my relationships. There is truly a mutual respect among us. Since COVID and the current situation, there has been a certain rise in anxiety and negativity towards daily life, and there I try to be positive in my attitude and words. What seems essential to me, in this world of work and encounters, is to work as a team, to be available when a colleague is sick or absent, and to live in humanity.

Today, I go to work with pleasure because it is a place of encounter, where the person is at the centre of my life as a man and as a religious, as much as my hierarchy, my colleagues, and the customers. Every day, I try to live the "Here I am" by remaining humble, consistent, and always content. To be able to live this, I set aside my personal life, my phone when I go to work, and I dedicate my work time as best as I can. I often pray at the service station for this or that person who has confided in me or is experiencing issues in their work. I live each day the "Here I am," imitating Christ among

the people of the working world by respecting each one and welcoming each one with who they are, their joys as well as their difficulties. One of my managers, knowing my situation as a Religious Brother and my commitments outside of work, asked me to be part of the works council. I accepted as a substitute, which allows me to be more involved and to listen to my colleagues.

Being in the world of work and as a consecrated person means being someone who is happy to live in this environment as a humble servant of God. The Good News is to live His Word every day, to imitate this Christ humbly present in each one of us, to know how to listen, see, hear my colleagues in their daily lives with their joys and sorrows. Knowing my life situation, sometimes some of my colleagues share their questions

regarding my commitment and about the life of the Church. There is a certain lack of knowledge about consecrated life and about the life of the Church. The Good News of Jesus is to say that everyone is part of this Church in progress, through their baptism. I know that some colleagues are involved in their parish life and others are very distant from Church life. The fact that I attended the General Chapter in Thailand in 2023 and took a month off without pay has struck my employers as well as some colleagues about my commitment within the religious family. Upon my return, I had to share what I had experienced and also to see the internationality of our family. ■



How to embody the charism in today's world

| Fr. Albert Sa-at scj

St. Paul reminds us about Spiritual gifts: *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but always the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the*

same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:4-7)

Fundamentally, a charism is a "[grace] of the Holy Spirit" (CCC, 799).

Our charism is a particular gift of the Spirit that inspired our founder, a father of bold vision, who gathered us (Betharramites) to help turn that vision into action.

The charism should be a part of who we are. As one book put it: "The goal is not to read a book; the goal is to become a reader. The goal is not to run a marathon; the goal is to become a runner. The goal is not to learn an instrument; the goal is to become a musician." ('Atomic Habits' James Clear)

For me as a Betharramite; "The goal is not become a religious in the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram; the goal is to become like Him (Jesus) a man of "Ecce Venio" (Here I am).

For me, a beautiful explanation from Most Rev.Fr. Joseph Mirande expresses and describes our Charismatic identity as Betharramite: "The Betharramite is the one who works freely and out of love.", "The authentic Betharramite is a volunteer...A Betharramite is a man who always says "Yes". A Betharramite is a man without ambitions. A Betharramite is a happy man..." (Acts of the XXVIII th General Chapter p.29-30)

So today's world asks me to ask myself: Am I a Volunteer? Do I always say "YES"? Am I without Ambitions? Am I a Happy Man.? If my answer is "yes" to all questions it means I embody and experience the Betharramite charism in today's

world.

Of course, the first place to embody and experience our Betharramite charism is in my community and through the community outwards to the world. "I was always looking for a community. I did not see myself as a priest on my own. I need a community." (Pope Francis)

For me, I really like the expression "To say Yes" in Vietnamese.

To say "Yes" in Vietnamese is "Xin Vâng".

The meaning of the word 'Xin' is 'ask', and 'Vâng' means 'yes'. So we dare to say as Betharramite that our goal is not just to say 'yes' but the goal is to say 'yes' like Him (Xin Vâng) = Here I am

For Our lady of Betharram Xin Vâng = Let it done.

I am not teaching you Vietnamese! But as Betharramites one of us may have to come to work in Vietnam in the future. So it is good to learn to say 'yes' in Vietnamese 'Xin Vâng'. Let's always have the courage to say 'yes'. As Pope Francis said; "Do not be afraid of what God asks of you! It is worth saying yes to God! In Him we find our joy."

I would like to share a little story which helps me for my daily reflection.

There is a tale of four people named Everybody, Somebody, Nobody and Anybody. There was an important job to be done.



Confucius once said "Don't complain about the snow on your neighbour's roof, when your own doorstep is unclean."

As a Betharramite; If I do not live the Betharramite charism, what kind of identity

will I show to the community, to the people, to the church and to the world.?

Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it but Nobody did it! Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it. But Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. (From the book 'One-month retreat for busy people')

If I do not let the charism be a part of my life, who will do (God's work)? Am I waiting for Somebody to do it? Or am I thinking that Anybody could do it? Or am I waiting to blame Somebody? No, I have to act and stop blaming. So instead of judging or blaming, let us be the first to act..... To act (as St. Michael reminds us) "always disposed to do what God wants and be willing to submit to all God does". (DS 41)

Each time I reflected on this story I was surprised to see that I could be all four people in one a day! So, how can I live the Betharramite charism? For certain I can't embody and experience our charism in my life if I am still four-in-one. On the contrary, only when I am simply at one with myself, can I live our charism in today's world. I can say that the story of four people helped me to reflect on 'who I am'. And it reminds me not to judge others' business.

So, the best way for me to embody and experience our Betharramite charism in today's world is as Most Rev. Fr. Joseph Mirande's explained; "The Betharramite is the one who works freely and out of love.". We are called to love and to serve God, "In this is Love- not that we have loved God, but that he has first loved us" (1 Jn 4.10)

Let us build love in our community first, "Thus community becomes "Schola Amoris," a School of Love, for young people and for adults -a school in which we all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom we live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God's mercy and of fraternal solidarity." ("Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor" 'Fraternal Life In Community' No. 25). We become a community of love only if we 'remain in his love.' Because the source of love is God himself who is love; "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (Jn 15;9)

Napoleon Hill once wrote that

the key to success is to "find out what you really love to do, and then find a way to make a good living doing it." In the same way the first and the most important thing I have to love is the Betharramite charism. Without loving the charism, I can't embody and experience it. Therefore, the only way to touch our world with this charism is for you and me to begin to live it where we are..... as our founder reminds us... "Out of love rather than any other motive" (DS 209) ■



To be close, like Him, to today's victims

| **Fr. Jean-Dominique Delgue scj**

Our reason for being, 'is to reproduce and manifest the impulse of the Heart of Jesus'. (Rule of Life §2) The charism of Betharram is par excellence a charism of openness: from the movement of the incarnation to the wound of Calvary. It begins with a strong response: 'Here I am, out of love.' This promptness in the gift of self, reminds us that life is here in the real world. It recalls St Michael's words from the Manifesto: 'He took the place of all victims' and it calls us to be close, like Him, to today's

victims too. (DS §1) (No. 4 Acts of the General Chapter 2023)

During Lent, especially in Week Holy, the above said orientation of the XXVIII General Chapter has resonated a lot in me as it invites us to become close to "all the victims today." Yes, so many victims Today! The list is so long: victims of war, victims of mistreatment, victims of sexual abuse, victims of violence, victims of famine, victims of disunity, victims of expulsion, victims

of migration....

Who is not touched, who is not questioned by suffering, often hidden even repressed, so many victims, that they be close or far? In different vicariates, the religious are confronted with distress, cries, despair of these children, young people, women or men often broken in their body, in their heart or in their soul. How do then we live, as close presence with these victims? How can we be witnesses of Christ who "took the place of all the victims"? How to accomplish the "Here I am, by love" at the very heart of this proximity with the victims?

It is necessary to recognize: every victim is a face that refers to his own fragility, his vulnerability, his finitude and his condition which is also sinful. A face that reminds everyone the destructive force of any kind of evil power that can endure or suffer. A face that invites us to recognize the evil at work.

At the same time, it is the silence that grips the heart before helplessness, in the face of the

unreparable. The silence of Good Friday. The silence of Christ on the path of his Passion where he takes the place of all the victims. It's not a silence of resignation but a silence which is like a Word announcing the infinite mercy of God, a silence of solidarity with humanity wounded by sin, a silence of abandonment. For, Easter morning comes to break the chains of evil, to offer forgiveness stronger than any kind of hatred and to reveal life stronger than anything.

Yes, being so close to the victims makes sense. It's a path of humility which is rooted in the identity of the Betharramite religious today. Being close to victims has a price. It is certainly a concrete way, in our present world with thousands of faces of victims, to be a faithful servant to the "very program of the Heart of Jesus: "motives of love, humility, gentleness, obedience, and devotion, contained in this first act of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Here I am". (RL. 27) ■



Betharramite lay faces

| Cesar E. Prous scj

Almost 20 years ago I asked a much-loved priest this question: "Father, why did you become a Betharramite? It is not a religious congregation as

large or well-known as others that are hundreds of years old and have thousands of members. What attracted you? What caught your attention?" I

never forgot his response: “Because I saw a Betharramite and I wanted to be like him.”

In my life I have met many Betharramites, and some inspired me to imitate them and others well...not so much. However, this one we can say – without fear of contradiction – inspired many of us to an incessant search for a lifestyle similar to his: that of our venerated Founding Father, the first Betharramite, Saint Michael Garicoits.

We lay people share the mission of the entire Church – by virtue of our baptism – to evangelize the places where we live and act, collaborating in this way with the salvation of people according to our particular lifestyle, different from the priestly or of consecrated life (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, # 31). Fulfilling this mission, but from a Betharramite identity, involves first of all the duty and challenge of knowing and making our own the charism of this Religious Congregation, impregnated above all in the person of its founder. When one tries to get to know Saint Michael, one does so fundamentally through the texts that tell us about his life and his doctrine, but we quickly realize that his teachings are mainly oriented towards consecrated life, and that is when we, the lay people who We try to live like him, we face the first difficulties in our attempt to imitate him, and the question arises: can one be a Betharramite layman?



What are the challenges we lay Betharramites face?

As one of the main ones, we could cite “access” to the charism, and by this I do not mean texts that tell us about Saint Michael, his work and his legacy, (thank God, in these times the internet has made it easier to find much of this material), but rather to be in permanent contact with those who “embody” the charism today: the Betharramite religious. Many times we only share intermittently in the celebration of a sacrament, spiritual retreat, or activities that have to do with the work carried out by those of us who are professionally linked to some work of the Congregation. But we need to share life more, and remember that the last “title” that Jesus granted to his Apostles came devoid of any position or hierarchy, but rather a shared life with its joys and its sorrows: he called them “friends” (cf. Jn 15, 15). Because, just

as the branches need to be united to the trunk to live and bear fruit (cf. Jn 15, 4), we, the lay Betharramites, need to be close and united to the religious to drink from the stream of the charism that they carry as children of Saint Michael. In this sense, both of us, that is, both lay people and Betharramite religious, have to strive to establish increasingly closer ties between us, and to cultivate a fraternal friendship in Christ that also makes us feel like brothers among ourselves. Finally, at this point I dare to go a little further to affirm that closeness to religious people can be the key to access many vocations that are hidden. How can a young person feel challenged by the divine call if they do not experience this closeness? How can they know what religious life is like? After all, we cannot leave all the work to the Holy Spirit alone... "We must give Providence a helping hand," Father Garicoits would say.

What joys and hopes do we lay people harbour who feel like spiritual children of Saint Michael Garicoits?



You cannot be a Betharramite without life in community, as this was what Saint Michael so desired for his Institute: he did not want a group of diocesan missionaries, but a true community capable of living under a common rule and spirit. In our case, as lay people, community life is carried out differently from that of religious people, for obvious reasons. In my personal experience, together with a group of friends motivated by a dear teacher (Nita) who instilled in us

the love for Saint Michael since our adolescence, and accompanied very closely by a great priest who is now in heaven (Father Jara), we started a couple of decades ago (2003) a community of lay people, when they were young, which is known by the name of Grupo FVD. From the beginning we set out to get to know

Saint Michael and his spirituality better, to put it into practice and spread it in our environment. We also wanted to collaborate, from our position as lay people, with the pastoral work of the Congregation in our situation, and we were also prepared to pray and work for vocations to religious and priestly life, especially Betharramites, so that they grow in quantity and holiness. Today, after the last Assembly of the group (December 2023), I once again have to assume the role of Superior, which implies the task of animating and supervising, with the team that accompanies me, the progress of the FVD Group, the different communities that make it up, and the various activities that we carry out throughout the year seeking to always be faithful to the objectives that we set at the beginning. This year, in line with the Holy Father and our Bishops, will be especially focused on prayer, preparing us for the Jubilee of Hope in the year 2025. As part of this process, we choose as our motto the phrase of Saint Michael "May our life be a continuous prayer."

And speaking of hope, I would like to share a little of ours. The Father of the Church Saint Isidore of Seville stated about hope: "the word hope is so called because it is like energy in our feet for walking. The opposite is desperation, because where the feet fail it is not possible to move forward." This analogy eloquently illustrates how hope moves us –

like the feet move the body – to continue "seeking for others the joy of knowing Jesus Christ", a phrase that we usually use in the FVD Group paraphrasing the Saint Michael Manifesto. And what situations feed our hope? Let us not forget that hope is a virtue that comes first from divine Grace. Therefore, to preserve hope we must always be open to this free gift from God; Hope is not a treasure that the Lord keeps hidden for a few enlightened people to find, but rather a gift that he gives us openly, but that we must accept voluntarily. Once again I can talk about my experience in the FVD Group: when we started, the oldest of us were barely over 20 years old; Currently we have not only kids in their last years of school but also young university students, professionals and workers, even dating couples, married couples and families. The Lord allowed us to grow as we go through the various stages of life and that gives us hope. It also gives us hope to see how, despite the strong attraction generated by the mundane, there are still young people with a desire to know God and get closer to Him, and how the spirituality that Saint Michael left us continues to be a valid means to achieve this. It awakens our hope that, despite the certain shortage of priests that we are suffering, there are still men willing to consecrate their entire lives to the service of God and the Church through this sacred ministry. And, finally, it is also a reason for



hope to see how more than 20 years have passed since that small youthful dream and we continue walking in community, persevering despite the difficulties, with the desire to know what the Lord has in store for us from here on. forward.

To conclude, I would like to remember the words with which, just a couple of weeks after his election as Supreme Pontiff, the beloved Pope Benedict XVI greeted the Betharramite Religious who were in Rome celebrating the General Chapter at that time: *"Dear brothers [...] always be faithful to the spirit of your founder, to be brave witnesses of the Gospel in our time"* (General Audience of Wednesday, May 4, 2005). May the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of the Beautiful Branch help all Betharramites, religious and lay, to be faithful to the charisma of

our Holy Founder, Father Michael Garicoits, so that we can spread, with words and example, this spirituality that led him to the glory of the altars. –FVD–.



•\• Notices of the general council •/\•

■ On May 10, in Chiang Mai (Thailand), **Br. Nicolas Surasak DOOHAE pronounced his perpetual vows** received by the Regional Superior of the Region Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified, Fr. Wilfred Pereppadan SCJ, delegate of the Superior General.



■ Today, May 14, in Bangalore (India), **Br. Joyal Budu Choorakkal pronounced his first vows** received by the Regional Superior of the Region Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified, Fr. Wilfred Pereppadan SCJ.



“The Superior’s Notebook”: at school with St Michael

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

Among the many old documents preserved in the Congregation’s archives is a small notebook, 10cm x 17cm, filled with carefully handwritten notes, entitled “The Superior’s Notebook”.

In the history of Betharram, it is known simply by its author’s name, the “Cachica Notebook”.

But who was Pierre Cachica?

Born at Orthez on 3 November 1836, and after completing his studies at the Collège Moncade in the town of his birth, he entered the Congregation of Betharram in 1853 and made his first profession two years afterwards. Like many seminarians of the day, in addition to following courses in philosophy and theology, he also taught at Betharram College. In 1858 he was ordained sub-deacon.

He died of tuberculosis on 23 February 1859, aged only 22. At that time, decidedly, death spared no-one for less than two months prior to his death, another seminarian, Paul Carrère, had also fallen ill and died. Such events take their toll on the community and such memories remained imprinted in the minds of their fellow religious.

In one of his lectures, Fr Garicoits



said: “The virtues of the good will spread throughout our Society, from generation to generation. We will not forget Mr Cachica, so submissive to God’s will was he. On the eve of his death, he thought he was less ill and perhaps even on the mend, but the very next day he was gone. He gave up his life willingly. However, at the thought of his mother, his heart broke ‘My Mother, O my Mother’ he was heard to cry out in desolation. His great faith overcame his distress and he said ‘Be that as it may, it’s not important! Here I am O my God” (Thoughts [Pensées] p. 28-29).

As a philosophy pupil, Cachica was taught by Fr Garicoits in person. The latter had the habit of illustrating his philosophy and morality lectures with real practical examples, often drawn from his personal life or events occurring in a faraway past. The Cachica Notebook

is nothing other than the most careful and precious record of notes taken by Cachica during the lessons given by the "Master"; not only did the young man record the philosophical developments, but also these examples and events recounted by St Michael, from his own personal experience.

These notes enable us, in an instant, to comprehend daily life in Betharram, in the classroom and during lessons; above all, however, they reveal some of the more intimate aspects of St Michael's life, his early childhood and youth, which otherwise we might never have known.

I shall recall but a few of these by way of example: his parents having to flee to Spain so as to marry before a Priest who had remained faithful to the teachings of the Church, whereas Priests in France had had to swear allegiance to the Revolution; the fact that, because of the Jansenist heresies prevailing at the

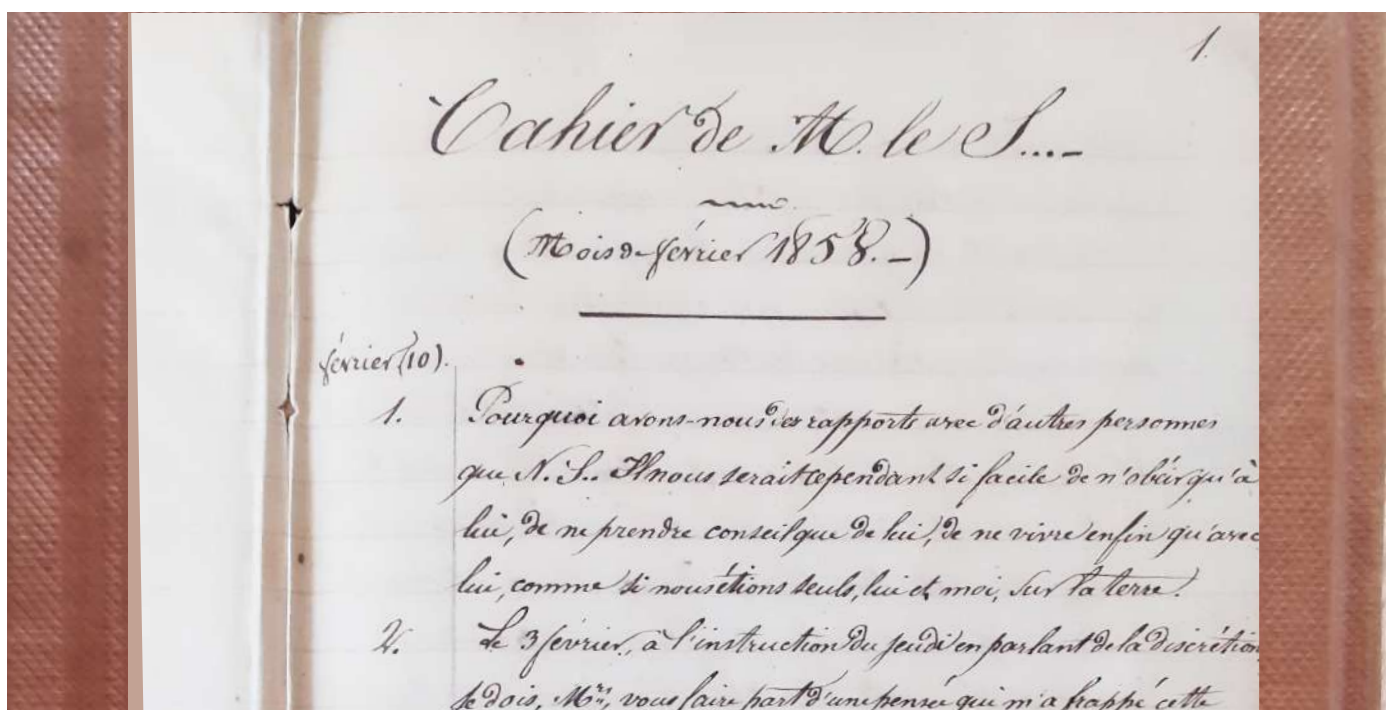
time, he was made to wait until he was 14 years old before he could receive his First Holy Communion; how his vocation was sustained by his grandmother's determination; and the sorry state of affairs in which he found the Betharram seminary when he arrived in 1825.

When Fr Etchecopar started the project so dear to his heart, namely the recognition of the Founder's saintliness, he questioned all the witnesses who had known him and asked his brother religious to let him have any- and everything, document or story relating to the life of Fr Garicoits and his writings.

And that is how Fr Charles Sampay¹ came to send him the "Cachica Notebook" from America to Betharram.

Fr Etchecopar was most grateful to

1) Charles Sampay, SCJ, who, at the death of Fr. Cachica and at the time he was himself a scholastic, probably continued to take notes during the lessons of Fr. Garicoits, which would explain why he was in possession of this notebook.



him for this: "I am writing to thank you for your letter about Fr Garicoits and Br Cachica's notes. These notes, down to their very last jot, have been of great interest to me, because of the details

about his childhood, told by our founder and the delightful way he connected them to questions of philosophy and theology." (Letter of 3 July 1879). ■

Quotes from *Cachica Notebook*, soon available in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and English.



Listening to Saint Michael who at the time of the notes was 61 years old:

(rough translations)

I remember another fact which proves to me that I had not innate the idea of the injustice of theft: one day a needle dealer came to us; my parents gave him wine, he put soup and swallowed it all. I was then five years old. As the merchant had displayed his merchandise I caught, I don't know how, a bundle of needles. When my mother saw him in my hands she gave me a very strong lesson; she told me that a child had gone to hell for a similar flight. I did not know what flight was until then; but since then I feared it as leading to hell, and especially I looked at the needles as having great importance.

...

At the age of 4, I entered our neighbor's house, and I threw a stone at a woman who I thought had hurt my mother and then I escaped with all my legs.

...

The Major Seminary of Betharram was going rather badly; the Superior, very good and old, did not react against disorder. Some abbots bought chickens, cooked pâtés in the oven of the house; the servant, in a short time, amassed about twenty thousand francs by selling wine to the seminarians; some, poor of family and enjoying the pension, made expenses of 150 fr. per year; In short, the seminary was considered as a refuge for all kinds of cassocks, as a collection of the saddest subjects of the land. Bishop d'Astros then sent the Superior to remedy these disorders.



Our life is a hidden life; we cannot know, whatever we do, whether we are pleasing to God; we say ‘it is for God to judge’; but why need we worry about this point? Our need, our duty, is to do all things well, then to abandon ourselves entirely into his fatherly hands. To do what he wants, when he wants and with courage! This is what must always be in our soul. [...]

“Cachica Notabook” § 9

Happy Feast of our Founder!



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