



FRIENDS

The Missionary Society of St. James
the Apostle

December 2024



Watering the Roots of Mission...

Dear Friends,

In this issue, our newest member, Fr. Melchor Andaya, who is based at El Resucitado Parish, reflects on the Christmas Narrative:

In St. Peter's Square in Rome, as the Advent season begins, a live pine tree is mounted and placed beside the beautiful crèche or "Presepe". Interestingly, that pine tree includes all of its roots, to ensure it will last for the entire Christmas season. While the whole world contemplates the Nativity Scene, it is also good to consider the vital role of those unseen Christmas Tree roots. In Lima, Perú during Christmastide, it is the hot summer season. Here, with the dry topography of Lima, the tree roots would eventually wither and die, without water. Likewise, our 'Christmas Trees of mission' must also be nourished. If we compare the roots of the Christmas tree, symbolically, to Lima's Christmas tree of mission, we understand that these mission roots may be deprived of essential needs if they are not tenderly watered by our solidarity. Why is it necessary and worthwhile to water the roots of Christmas tree in the mission of Perú? Recall the words from Psalms, "The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land." (Psalm 95:5).

Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.

Each time we nourish the roots of missionary work, we become part of God's creative hands. Lending hands to nourish the roots in a dry land is a concrete prayer to bless the works of our hand especially during Christmas where the Son of God divinely watered the drought condition of our humanity through His Incarnation.

We do not have a White Christmas in Peru, nor hear the sleigh bells in the snow. In fact, it is the peak of summertime here. Yet, Christmas in Peru offers something unique to us— to nurture what is beneath, to cultivate the unseen and support that which generates life for the people here. We have a season where we can nurture the roots, help them retain water and conserve life. There is less need to wrap presents and a much greater need to give our talents and our gifts to others. We may rediscover the meaning of the Incarnate Word, as this is the root of the season's celebration. A missionary Christmas is focused on love; not on the exchange of gifts. St. Bernard of Clairvaux taught about the "*Four Degrees of Love*." The fourth degree is "*to love ourselves only for the sake of God*". In these moments our minds and wills may be one with God's, just as a drop of a water poured into a cup of wine takes on the qualities of the wine and loses its identity.¹ "*When we attain the fourth degree of love, then the net of charity...does not cease to gather together fish of every kind*".² The mission of the Eternal Word is to give life from the Father to humanity and the cross is also necessary to grow in the divine presence of our Lord. We hope that we can lighten the burdens weighing on the shoulders of our brethren, this Christmas. May we help them carry their crosses as we relay the same message the Angel of the Lord gave the shepherds, about the Emmanuel: "*Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.*" (Lk: 2:10-11) It is important that our Christmas is still rooted on the Cross so that we will not forget our mission to help others carry their crosses. Our work follows the truth of the Incarnation.



1 Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Four Degrees of Love*, <https://renovare.org/articles/four-degrees-of-love>

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As we pray the words, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn: 1:14), we are given zeal for the mission to come to fruition in our time. The root of mission is love for God and neighbor. Christmas teaches us to love Jesus who was born among us; to love others as He loves us. My mission journey began after finishing my licentiate in Spiritual Theology in Rome, when my bishop assigned me to the farthest town of our diocese, as the parish priest of St. Michael the Archangel, Jalajala, Rizal. The parish is a mission area. Going from Rome to Jalajala was not an easy adjustment for me and I reminded myself, that even St. Pope John Paul II was also assigned to the farthest part of his home diocese, after completing his studies in Rome. *Who am I to complain?* After two years serving there, my call to mission grew deeper. Recalling the invitation of Fr. David and Fr. Pat from a decade earlier, in Manila, my journey continued towards South America. When I asked my bishop for permission to go on mission with the Society of St. James, he said, smiling, “*I didn’t know that you had a missionary heart.*” Since he was retiring that year, he asked me to wait for his successor to make the decision. Then, on his birthday, he told me the good news: that his successor, Bishop Ruperto, would allow me to serve on mission! Bishop Ruperto is the Promoter of Stella Maris, a Mission Apostolate to Filipino Marines all over the world. I arrived in Perú during the springtime season, when roots are growing and buds are preparing to blossom. Now, in God’s goodness, I have one year of experience under my belt and I believe my roots are stronger. Last Christmas was my first in Peru and I appreciated and enjoyed the Christmas bustle and numerous processions, Masses and Nativity scenes. Thanks to donations from the St. James Society and an alumnus, we were able to give the people of Villa María del Triunfo gifts of food and nourishment during this Holy Season.



The people of Villa María del Triunfo lack running water and have minimal electricity. They live in the higher regions, outside the town (called the 'cerros'). They are struggling to survive. They live here because they cannot afford to pay rent in the urban areas. They were very thankful for these vital gifts of nourishment. Our active mission work continues all year but Christmas is a special time to recall Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as the Savior was born into humble surroundings, born to become man, in order to save us. *We wish you, our benefactors, a very blessed Christmas and a healthy and happy New Year!*

~ Fr. Melchor Andaya



Prayer to Jesus in the Manger¹

O divine redeemer Jesus Christ, prostrate before thy crib, I believe thou art the God of infinite majesty, even though I do see thee here as a helpless babe. I humbly adore and thank thee for having so humbled thyself for my salvation as to will to be born in a stable. I thank thee for all thou didst wish to suffer for me in Bethlehem, for thy poverty and humility, for thy nakedness, tears, cold and sufferings.

Would that I could show thee that tenderness which thy virgin mother had toward thee, and love thee as she did. Would that I could praise thee with the joy of the angels, that I could kneel before thee with the faith of St. Joseph, the simplicity of the shepherds. Uniting myself with these first adorers at the crib, I offer thee the homage of my heart, and I beg that thou wouldst be born spiritually in my soul. Make me reflect in some degree the virtues of thy admirable nativity. Fill me with that spirit of renunciation, of poverty, of humility, which prompted thee to assume the weakness of our nature, and to be born amid destitution and suffering. Grant that from this day forward, I may in all things seek thy greater glory, and may enjoy that peace promised to men of good will.

- Author Unknown

¹ <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/advent-and-christmas-prayers>

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

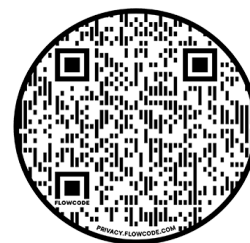
Rev. David Costello, Director



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