



FRIENDS

The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle

August 2024



Sacrifice...Service...Commitment

Dear Friends,

In this issue Fr. Michael Sharkey reflects with us on his experience serving as Pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish on the north side of Lima, Peru. The parish itself is quite a huge geographical area with a mix of urban and rural shantytowns:

"Of all the works of the Catholic Church, there is none greater, more noble or more holy than the work of the foreign missions, for there is none so poor, so naked or so hungry as they who know not God" (Pope Pius XII).

As I consider these words of Pope Pius XII, I am reminded, once again, of the importance of my missionary work here in Carabayllo, Lima, Peru. As priests, our principal role is to preach the Gospel and celebrate the Eucharist

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



*H*owever, preaching the gospel in places like South America, Africa and numerous other countries, where poverty is prevalent, demands sacrifice and a very deep commitment. The conditions in which our parishioners live can be austere and challenging. As priests we always need to be conscious of their living conditions, understanding where they are coming from, and what their needs, fears and worries are. For example, one of the communities that I visit each week is a shantytown full of homes that are constructed of plywood which do not have glass windows, but plastic windows instead. The homes are not insulated against the heat or cold. In the winter months, three or four

blankets will afford the residents some warmth during cold nights. Their small chapel is also constructed of the same material. It is a question of wrapping up warmly to attend Mass! Fortunately for me, the cold weather is tolerable, having grown up in Scotland and spent four winters with the Royal Marines in Norway! Therefore, when I show up wearing a tee shirt, I do receive many strange looks! Considering the cool temperatures and the commitment it takes for the people to get to Mass during these winter months, the parishioners' enthusiasm and the liveliness of their singing during the Mass is inspiring and you can just feel the joy and enthusiasm throughout the chapel and beyond. People will often ask me why I want to serve on the Missions, especially after completing twenty-nine years as a chaplain to the Royal Navy/Royal Marines. The answer is very simple. As a very young priest, it was always my wish to serve on the missions, especially in South America. However, I also thought too, that this window of opportunity had passed me by, since I retired from the Royal Navy at such a late stage in my life. Therefore, I was very grateful to The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle for giving me this wonderful opportunity to serve the poor in Peru.

A very important influence in my life, who helped me feel the call to go on mission, was St. Martin de Porres. I developed a very strong devotion to St. Martin de Porres and I was always inspired when reading about how he worked tirelessly for the poor and the sick in Lima, Peru. Ever since I was a child, I have admired his willingness to reach out to those most in need. St. Martin de Porres, is a wonderful example for those working on mission today. My parish in Carabayllo, is called "Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe". It has recently been given the title, "Santuario". Since Fr. Denis Parry's retirement from this parish last August, I have been the priest in charge.

After so many years in the Armed Forces, I consider myself quite adaptable, but work on missions demands flexibility and an open mind; I have and continue to adjust to operate more effectively within this parish. Masses are celebrated here every day. Saturday and Sunday are obviously our busiest days. Since I arrived here two years ago, I continue to be impressed by our choir. Thanks to their musical talent, our Masses are very uplifting and meaningful, with a wide variety of music and appropriate hymns based on the readings of the day.



St. Martin de Porres statue



The choir is an absolute joy to listen to and their musical talents are appreciated by our parishioners, who also love to join in singing with them.

Each year, beginning in April, we undertake a Catechetical program for the children in the parish. Towards the end of the second year of that program, the children will receive the Sacraments of Baptism (if not already baptized), Penance, and First Holy Communion. The catechists, parents and youth of the parish are all involved in the

instruction of the children, in the faith. Currently, we have over ninety children in each of these two-year groups, totaling 180 children. I am also responsible for four other small chapels and communities in the parish. I celebrate Mass each week in each community, with two of the worshipping communities running their own catechetical program.

During my time in the parish, I often receive requests to bless a house or a vehicle. Blessing a home gives me an opportunity to meet and build relationships with that family.



While I have officiated many house blessings over the last 41 years as a priest, I must admit that I had never been asked to bless a bus or a truck until I came to Peru! This was a new experience for me!!





Every week, I am amazed and reminded of the generosity of the parishioners. One recent example of their generosity was a birthday party they organized for Fr. Denis and I, when Fr. Denis returned to the parish to assist for a short while. Many of the parishioners would have little themselves but they still give generously from what they have, in order to express their appreciation for us. We had a very enjoyable evening with lots of good food and plenty of laughter. As I reflect on the words of Pope Pius XII, I have no doubt that each priest in The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle, with his own unique gifts is bringing the good news of the gospel and the love of God to those who most need it today.

Thank you for your kindness and support. Please continue to pray for the priests of the Society and those whom they serve.

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

Rev. David Costello, Director



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24 Clark Street • Boston, MA 02109 • (617) 742-4715 • e: office@socstjames.com • socstjames.com