

MIRROR



Celebrating Mass in Peru



Dear Friends,

The Church has been sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. This mission reflects the love of God “who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). It means bringing Christ to those places where He is not yet known – or has been forgotten. Not only with words, but above all by the living witness of our Faith and active Christian charity.

Vatican II’s document *Ad Gentes* emphasises that mission is the task of the whole Church. Every baptised Christian is called to participate in it – through their prayer, service of the poor and courageous profession of faith. At the same time, the Council urges us to respect different cultures. The Gospel must take root in the hearts of each culture, without injuring its people’s identity. Only in this way will it become alive and credible.

At the heart of all missionary work is the Eucharist, because it is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*). In it Christ’s sacrifice is made present – for the salvation of the world.

Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, new hope springs forth.

And yet, in many parts of the world priests celebrate the Eucharist in very difficult conditions – without permanent churches, often in poverty and adversity – and sometimes even at risk of their lives. Yet they remain faithful to their communities and to Christ.



“Prayer, love of mission and closeness to the Eucharist can make missionaries of all of us.”

Again and again, visitors from our project countries say that our Mass offerings mean far more to them than just financial support. Rather, these priests see them as a sign of our solidarity, a solid expression of our love and concern. Mass stipends often cover the basic essentials of life, giving them the strength to continue celebrating the Eucharist.

When you make a Mass offering, Christ’s redemptive sacrifice is celebrated for your own personal intentions – by priests serving the faithful who are themselves living in need. In return you are giving them not

only material support but also hope and spiritual support, thus making the universal communion of the faithful a concrete reality.

100 years ago Saint Therese of Lisieux was canonised. Although she never left the Carmel in Lisieux, living her entire religious life there, nevertheless, on 14 December 1927 she was declared Patroness of the Missions by Pope Pius XI. She shows us just how prayer, love of mission and closeness to the Eucharist can make missionaries of all of us.

Let us remain united to our missionaries by prayer and practical support. Many priests today depend on your generosity. Through your Mass offerings you are giving them renewed hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

With my warmest greetings and blessings to you all,



Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



Where the savannah becomes a CATHEDRAL

"And I absolve you from your sins..."

Panis angelicus: "The bread of angels is made the bread of man..." So runs this beautiful Eucharistic hymn of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Under the outward forms of bread and wine, the Lord gives himself as real food to the faithful – no less in an African bush chapel than in a splendid cathedral.

Today, 41 Missionaries of Mary Immaculate from India serve in the war-torn and crisis-ridden countries of **South Sudan**, **Ethiopia** and the **Central African Republic**. Undeterred by the danger to their own lives, they courageously serve in places where few would willingly venture. Time and again, they face difficulties and setbacks. Only last year, four of these priests became so ill that they were forced to return to India for treatment, while in South Sudan two of their mission stations had to be closed following yet another flare-up in the ongoing violence there. But Father Robert Rufus, their Provincial Superior, nevertheless declares: "The challenges may be growing ever greater, but we will never give up. It is God who gives us the strength and the courage to continue in our mission." So when they are forced to leave one place, the Fathers simply open a new mission outpost elsewhere. But

still, without your support, their work would be nearly impossible.

In **Tanzania**, the situation is particularly difficult for the 24 diocesan and religious priests on Zanzibar, where the population is 98% Muslim and where Islam is becoming increasingly radicalised. The few Christians living here are facing growing pressure. Without your Mass stipends the priests could not carry out their pastoral work. "Every ounce of help they get goes on supplying the basic needs of their communities", Bishop Augustine Ndelia-kyama Shao assures us.

On the Tanzanian mainland, the majority of the population are Christians. The Church is very much alive here, rich in vocations and the faithful are flourishing, although materially poor. That's why Bishop Edward Mapunda of Singida has



Incense: symbol of adoration.

asked us to help the 83 priests in his diocese. "I know that you receive requests for Mass stipends from all over the world, all of them entirely justified. But if it were possible for you to continue supporting us, we would be most grateful. I am conscious of the great sacrifices you make for us. Thank you for accompanying us for so many years in our mission. It is thanks to your sacrifice that we are surviving! You are a blessing for us and a gift of God!"

The priests who celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Africa are honoured to offer your intentions with the host on the paten. Where God Himself is present in the Eucharist, in His divinity and His humanity, you can be sure that even in the smallest, most remote African village, the angels still kneel in adoration. Then the humble chapel in the savannah becomes a cathedral.

Who knows? Maybe a priest will soon be celebrating Mass, somewhere in Africa, for you and your loved ones.



Even in the humblest of chapels, Christ is truly present.



‘Seedbeds of PEACE’

Over the past 40 years almost 100 priests have been murdered in **Colombia**, and dozens more abducted. But despite this, the priests of this Latin American country refuse to be intimidated.

Ever since the mid-1960s armed conflict of one sort or another has been raging in Colombia. And despite the peace accord of 2016, large parts of the country are still under the control of armed groups. Indeed, since last year the violence has been increasing again.

Bishop Israel Bravo Cortés of Tibú tells us: “A region like ours, that has been so severely marked by violence and death, needs God. Its people need the presence of the Lord in their hearts, so they can confront and change the many painful situations that have overshadowed their lives. We feel compelled to build a new culture, in which the Good News of peace is front and centre.”



“May the Lord bless you and keep you...”

Father Lawrence Ssimbwa (43) is from Uganda in East Africa and is now working as a missionary in Buenaventura, one of the most dangerous cities in Colombia, where many of its inhabitants have African roots. His vocation is partly the fruit of a childhood experience. It was the year 1994, when the Rwandan genocide began. His family took in 30 refugees into their own home. “Every day my mother got up very early and made porridge for them. These refugees stayed with us for over a year. And so from a young age I learned



Father Lawrence: working in a dangerous place.

from my mother’s care for others. It was a lesson for life,” he recalls. Today he is committed to supporting families so they can become “seedbeds of peace”. And he confesses, “Despite the many challenges, I am happy here in Buenaventura!”

Like Fr Ssimbwa, many other priests in Colombia are tirelessly working to ensure that the precious seeds of Christ’s message of peace take root. They depend on your help. Please don’t abandon these courageous shepherds!

Joyful **FAITH** on the islands

“The Lord reigns [...] let the many coastlands be glad,” says Psalm 96/97:1. This speaks directly to the hearts of the Indonesian faithful.

In this south-east Asian country, with its thousands of coastlands and islands, Catholics are a small minority – but they live their faith with joy. However the work of their priests is not easy. Many villages are accessible only via mud tracks, sometimes crossing riverbeds which are only passable in the dry season. But that does

not stop them from tirelessly fulfilling their mission.

Your Mass offerings are a great source of strength to so many priests in their ministry. “Words are not enough to express our gratitude. You are wonderful people, chosen by God to be messengers of God’s love in this world,” Father Eduardus writes to all of you.

Can we continue to count on your support for Indonesia’s priests?



“For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth” (Ps 96/97:9): Beteng, Indonesia.



HEROES of the kingdom of God

Did you ever read inspiring stories about heroic missionaries when you were a child? Christ's call to proclaim the Gospel to all nations is valid in every day and age.

In Leo XIV we have a Pope who, for almost 20 years, was a missionary in Peru. "Padre Roberto", as he was known, would ride for hours on a mule in order to reach the remotest villages. Sometimes he would even spend the night with the sheep in a stable. Photos of him as a bishop show him in wellington boots, wading through mud and water in order to help out after a flood.

Father John J. Lydon, who spent 10 years together with him in the mission, recalls the painful years of the 1990s in Peru, when the Maoist Shining Path guerrillas inflicted great suffering on the people and threatened to kill the missionaries. "Their goal was to destroy the country in order to build a 'new society' from its ashes", he explains. But the missionaries stayed on, despite the danger to their own lives. "We tried to find ways of supporting the people on this, their Way of the Cross."



Before he ever sat in the Popemobile... Pope Leo XIV, as a missionary on his mule.

For so many priests and religious around the world, the "vineyard of the Lord" lies in the jungle, in the megacity slums, the African bush or in remote and mountainous regions. Leaving home and family behind, they endure privations and extremes of climate, are exposed to dangerous diseases, like malaria, and courageously stay on in war-torn regions in order to shield and help the helpless. When their mission stations are looted, burned and reduced to ashes, they simply begin again, trusting in God's help. For they know that if they do not care for the poor, then nobody will. Schools, boreholes, medical care – in many cases these are present entirely thanks to the presence of the missionaries. But above all they bring the love of Christ to the people. For as Pope Leo XIV said recently, "the gravest form of poverty is not to know God."

These missionaries rarely mention just how much it has cost them to leave behind family and friends. Most of them aren't even able to get back for their parents' funerals. And sometimes they encounter little interest on their rare visits home. Life has gone on without them, their nephews and nieces are strangers to them, and modern society simply does not understand their Christian witness. That hurts. And yet only a handful voluntarily aban-



Brazil: Padre Paolo visiting a village in the Amazon region on foot.

don their mission. Health permitting, many continue to serve into a ripe old age.

You can help these missionaries and show your closeness to them, through your prayers and practical help. A contribution towards their livelihood, whether it helps buy a vehicle they urgently need or building a new village chapel, you can show them that they have not been forgotten.

Will you help us to help these "heroes of God's Kingdom"?



Angola: watched over by the Mother of God.



“I am God’s **DONKEY**”

No one in his village would have imagined he would do it. “What, Elko becoming a priest? Isn’t that the tractor driver, who goes round with his horse selling coal in his spare time? Nonsense!” his neighbours scoffed. “In fact they refused to believe it until they saw me in my religious habit,” says **Bulgarian Father Elko Terziyski (43)**.



Once he was a tractor driver, now he proclaims God’s Word.

At school, they mocked Elko because he was a Catholic and had three siblings. “Only the Roma – the so-called gypsy people – had that many children. They treated us like lepers,” he recalls. As Catholics, his family were heavily victimised by the Communist regime.

At the age of 10 Elko became an altar server. Although he describes himself as having been a “wild and unruly child”, he nevertheless wanted to become a priest. “But nobody took me seriously,” he recalls.

On leaving school he joined the Capuchin Franciscans. Even in his studies almost no one thought he would make the grade, so even then he suffered a great deal. “But it doesn’t matter; God gave me the strength to do it,” he says.

One day he opened his Bible and happened upon the passage where Jesus makes his solemn entrance into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, saluted by the people waving palm branches. So the idea came to him that “I am a donkey that no one rode on when it was young. But later, Christ rode on it. He is God, so He can do anything. But woe to that donkey, if he forgets who is riding upon him! So he must never become puffed up and proud, just because people trust him and treat

him with respect. For then that donkey would be nothing more than a donkey, serving only himself. The priest is a donkey, blessed by the Lord and commissioned to carry Him to other people. On earth he is fulfilling God’s will and acting as His mouth, His hands and His feet.”

With feeling, Father Elko insists: “The One I live for has chosen me, just as I am. He loves me just as I am, and He will redeem me. It is astonishing just how much God is willing to invest in what, to us, seems bad, lost, wild and untamed. So I am a priest today, and I marvel at the patience, love and mercy of God.”



“Word made flesh, by word he maketh very bread his Flesh to be”



Father Elko Terziyski: happy to be a priest.

Among the approximately 10,000 seminarians whom, thanks to your generosity, we are able to support worldwide, there are many others that nobody would have imagined would have become priests. Some grew up in refugee camps, others were orphans or came from broken homes; many found study difficult and a few had been drug addicts. Many encountered opposition from friends and family in pursuing their vocation. But God is the one who calls – and He calls the ones HE chooses.

Seeing this grace is a gift, it gives each of us hope in the Lord’s boundless mercy.



Thank you for supporting our mission!

Lithuania is the only country in the former Soviet Union with a majority Catholic population. Under Communism, however, many generations grew up without faith. Today, many people are searching for meaning. Father Frédéric Simonis has written to us from the tiny village of Baltriskes:



“The peace and joy of Christ be with you! Many thanks for the Mass stipends you sent me. Every day, when I celebrate Mass here in this little village of northern Lithuania, I remember you and your intentions.

I come from Belgium, and for six years I have been a missionary in Lithuania. There are eight brothers of our order here, and many individuals and groups come to us to take part in retreats and deepen their faith.

I am very touched to think that I can pray for your intentions, while you are helping us to pursue our mission with the children, young people and families here. Many many thanks! We are always close to you in prayer.”

Need, love and thanks – your letters

ACN is a team effort

Just a few lines to express my appreciation to each of you. ACN is a team effort. The benefactors playing their part; along with you fantastic people doing your important role. With respect and gratitude to all of you.

A benefactor from Australia

In gratitude

I’m very conscious of the great privilege we enjoy, in being able to live here in peace and tranquillity, with enough to eat, a home and work, and schools for our children to go to. Every day I give thanks to our loving God for this. This contribution to ACN is an expression of my gratitude, in the hope that it will also improve the lives of other people.

A friend and benefactress in Slovakia

From Brazil, with love

Hello, I’m Sabrina. You may not meet me or know where I’m from... but know this: you are important. Across the world, someone is thinking of you, praying for you, and asking God to protect you, keep you safe, and bring you to a place of peace. I send you love, hope, and faith. You are not alone. If one day you can, please, smile again. Don’t give up. With love,

A friend from Brazil

A gift from heaven

Thank you to ACN for the work you do, with heart and mind. ACN is a gift from heaven. It gives us guidance and support and expands our horizons, uniting us with persecuted Christians. And it has taught me to be thankful for everything I have.

A benefactress in Germany



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

There was a popular hymn in the sixties with the refrain, “They will know we are Christians by our love” and it is this love that the thousands of priests, religious and consecrated laity bring, when they leave their home to bring God to people, often in faraway places. They leave familiar surroundings and take risks driven by their love for others and their desire to share the Good News with them.

Pope Leo XIV reminds us that we are all called to be missionaries. As a former missionary in Peru, he has spoken several times – including in his first greeting on 8 May, just after his election as Pope – about the need to be a “missionary Church”. He reminds us that this has been entrusted to St. Peter and his successors and also to each one of us.

The Holy Father encourages us to fully commit to our daily tasks and to do them with faith, “because faith and prayer are like salt in food: they give it flavour”.

We do not need to leave our homes to be missionaries. If we do everything in the spirit of our faith, we are loving God and our neighbour and we are showing others what it means to be a Christian. They will know we are Christians by our love!

Regina Lynch

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

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