No Greater Love
Why Be a Missionary?
The Friar and the Refugees
NO LIMITS

The forgiveness granted on Golgotha
Knows no limits.

Neither the law with its quibbles,
Nor the wisdom of this world with its distinctions,
Can hold it back.

The Church’s forgiveness must be every bit as broad
As that offered by Jesus on the Cross.

There is no other way.

The Holy Spirit makes us ministers of forgiveness,
So divine mercy may reach
All men and women in every age.

– Pope Francis

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 10 February.
Spirit and Life.

From the Editor.

No Greater Love. Gerald Evans OFM continues his reflection on his experience when the guerrillas and the military fought in his parish, a barrio in San Salvador, in November 1989.

A Wonderful Afternoon with Blessed Oscar Romero. María Eugenia Iraheta recalls the powerful impression the martyred archbishop had on her as a teenager.

The God with a Migrant Face. Franciscan Sister, María Diana Muñoz Alba FMM, spent several months working in a migrant camp called ‘The 72’ in Mexico.

Church Brief.

Why Be a Missionary? Italian friar Marco Freddi OFM, who studied English in Ireland last year, is a missionary in South Sudan.

From Iraq to Morocco: Hopes for the Jubilee Year. Oliver Maksan of Aid to the Church in Need writes of how Christians living in Arab lands hope to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

The Face of the Father’s Mercy. The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy began on 8 December. In the Papal Bull, announcing this special time of grace, Pope Francis celebrates the divine mercy that is at the origin and heart of Christian discipleship.

Pope Francis... ‘Eat With Your Family, Not With Your Smartphone.’ For Pope Francis the dinner table is a key place to strengthen family bonds and foster a sense of ‘togetherness’.

Welcomed, Loved, Forgiven.

The Franciscans in Bantry. Pat Conlan OFM looks at the turbulent history of our friary in Bantry, Co. Cork.

News from Around the Franciscan World.


Wisdom for the Journey. Gearóid Ó Conaire OFM went to El Salvador as a young friar in 1984. He shares some of the core truths he has learned on the journey so far.

Ordination in Harare.

Mission Digest. Visit to Zimbabwe.
I find it is never easy to ask. It’s often much easier to give than to ask for help. St Francis, a most realistic and down to earth man, told the Brothers in the Rule he wrote for them that they should always have the humility to make their needs known to others. A good Franciscan should have the modesty to ask for help when he needs it.

Guided by the advice of St Francis, I am now making my needs known to you, gentle reader.

Towards the end of last year I had the task of reviewing our finances in the Mission Office for the year just ended. I’m sure it will come as no surprise to you to learn that our income is falling steadily, month on month, while at the same time the demand on what we do is growing all the time.

At present, for example, Zimbabwe has six postulants, ten novices, fifteen brothers studying either philosophy or theology. All that good formation and training costs money and is an investment in the future of the Order and Church in Zimbabwe. So as the number of people supporting us gets less, the help we are asked to give, grows.

Now that Christmas is over and Lent is just round the corner, I am hoping that you, our faithful supporters over the years, would consider making a special contribution to the work of our missions in Zimbabwe.

Apart from the formation of the young friars mentioned above, the brethren in Zimbabwe run parishes in poor areas, both in urban and rural settings; they pay for children to go to school; they provide food for the poor; and they help the people in a hundred other different ways.

What a pity it would be if that good work were to slow down or stop for want of resources.

If you can help in any way, please contact me – Brother Stephen, OFM, Franciscan Missionary Union. Merchants Quay, Dublin 8.

As always, you and all your needs are in our continual prayers.

– Stephen O’Kane OFM (director.fmu@franciscans.ie)
After a terrible night of bombing raids we awoke in the barrio to the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of Conacastes. Very early in the morning, people began to move towards San Fernando and Soyapango in search of food and water. However nowhere was secure as gunfire could be heard ringing out everywhere. At about 8.00am Andres arrived at our doorstep announcing the shattering news of the assassination of the six Jesuits at the Central America University (UCA) in the city, their housekeeper and her young daughter. Their names were Ignacio Ellacuría, Amando López Quintana, Juan Ramón Moreno Pardo, Ignacio Martín Baró, Joaquín López y López, Segundo Montes Mozo, their cook Elba Julia Ramos and her daughter Celina Maricet Ramos were murdered alongside the Jesuits.

I received the news with shocked disbelief. I felt myself to be trapped in a nightmare trying valiantly but vainly to wake up. ‘Which ones?’ I fearfully asked Andres. As he named each one I felt like someone being hit with a hammer with a resounding NO! from the depths of my being as their noble faces flashed through my mind’s eye. I could hardly speak. Andres put a consoling and friendly arm around my shoulder and sat me down. After a moment of silence he turned to me and suggested very respectfully that I might need to consider my own position about staying in the barrio since it seemed that the military were on the rampage against all foreign priests in El Salvador equating them as supporters of the guerrillas. I just nodded and thanked him.

Gerald Evans OFM continues his reflection on his experience when the guerrillas and the military fought in his parish, a barrio in San Salvador, in November 1989. After six Jesuits were murdered he had to struggle with fear for his life.

I needed to be alone to absorb this terrible news, to pray and discern what to do. The faces of those men were so present to me at that moment and even today I feel moved as I think of them. Those I knew best were Amando Lopez who studied his theology as a young Jesuit student in Miltown. Amando always smiled when he saw me arriving at the university. He once remarked, ‘When I see you coming Gerardo I feel happy as I know it’s to ask me to come and celebrate Mass among your poor parishioners which for me is a privilege and God’s gift to me to keep me focused on what it’s truly all about.’ ‘So often here in the university we escape into our heads,’ he added. And Juan Ramón Moreno, with his quiet, humble presence among the campesinos.

Two Orders Over the centuries in Latin America the two congregations, Franciscans and Jesuits, complimented one another in evangelising the Latin American continent. The Franciscans tended to open up the furrows on the frontier while the Jesuits moved in afterwards to consolidate their work. The Jesuits tended to work in the colleges and
universities while the Franciscans worked on the margins among the urban and rural poor. Both Orders continued that tradition in El Salvador during my time working there. Both had a very strong sense and conviction of the significant historical moment we were living through with a corresponding sense of responsibility to shape it according to the evangelical values of justice, solidarity, compassion and forgiveness. Both congregations adhered to a very grounded, practical, down to earth spirituality inspired by the incarnation, believing life’s journey not so much to be about human beings trying to be spiritual but rather, very much the contrary, spiritual beings trying to be human.

Like many countries at that time in Latin America, El Salvador was in transition to democracy, emerging from years of dictatorship under military rule where a vertical chain of command style of leadership was the rule of thumb. This stifling and uncreative style of leadership and ethos permeated the whole of the culture creating an infantile society, outwardly conforming but inwardly repressed and stunted. Instinctively many of us felt very strongly our role as midwives in accompanying and encouraging the emerging birth pangs of democratic values.

The Jesuits carried this out through their colleges and universities while the Franciscans did so within the basic Christian communities they accompanied on both the urban and rural margins. Within these communities people were trained in the art of dialogue, debate, participation, consensus, respectful listening and collaborative decision making. At the same time we encouraged them to look critically from the biblical perspective at the unjust social, political, economic structures maintaining the country’s miniscule wealthy in their privileged lifestyle, with a view to being a catalyst for change benefiting the common good.

As we all know this option on the part of the Catholic Church to encourage people to take seriously the social ramifications of the Gospel was new and provoked widespread criticism, indeed indignation among the middle and upper classes of Latin America. But it galvanised the poor, transforming the Catholic Church in Latin America into a Church primarily of the poor and disinherited. The present Pope is a product of and indeed was one of the architects of this vision and option.

Fear

During the morning a number of people visited us and commented that the military were asking about the whereabouts of the foreign priests in our area. The rule of law had broken down and we suddenly felt ourselves to be in a jungle where anything was possible. At about 11.00am we received news that the army were asking around the parish specifically for the whereabouts of Peter O’Neill OFM and myself. Things were evolving fast.

However, as the air was laden with rumours, filling us with increased fear, we were at risk of acting impulsively. We had to be careful to verify everything insofar as possible.

Every experience offers a learning opportunity and this was no exception. I had always regarded fear as a negative emotion. But Monseñor Romero focused me on an aspect of his personality which afforded me great insight and clarity at that particular moment. Monseñor Romero was by nature a very timid and fearful person. He readily admitted it himself, but added that the courageous person is not the fear-
I felt the dilemma deeply. A riot of contradictory thoughts and feelings assailed me to the core. I thought, I cannot just leave when the community is living through its most difficult moment. Yet by staying I risk not just being killed but slaughtered like the Jesuits. A thought crossed my mind. I will ask Roxanna; I know she will shed light on this moment for me. Roxanna was one of the leaders in the community. Her husband and brothers were all members of the basic Christian communities and the unions in their respective workplaces. All had been assassinated by the death squads. She also worked with another assassinated priest, Rutilio Grande. He had trained the people of his parish in Aguilares, on the outskirts of San Salvador, to read the Bible in the light of justice, solidarity, mercy and forgiveness as a means to changing the social, political, economic and personal reality of their lives.

To this day I will never forget her profile as she stood in the doorway by the light of the ebbing day's evening sun, arms folded, eyeing me with a very serious face. 'So you are off, Fray,' she announced. I met her glance, stunned, and replied, 'I am thinking about it.' 'Well think well, Fray,' she replied sharply. 'Why did you come out here in the first place?' she continued. 'To accompany the people here,' I replied. 'Strange thing to be running off, Fray, when we most need your accompaniment,' she replied. 'But the situation has become very complicated and dangerous for us foreigners,' I replied. 'It's difficult and dangerous for all of us, Fray,' she replied, 'for all of us,' she repeated with an edge to it. I remained looking at her for a moment and she at me. 'Fray,' she interjected, ‘like all of us, I know that Monseñor Romero has been a great inspiration to you. In your homilies you have quoted him so often. But his words are meaningless, Fray, absolutely meaningless, indeed they are just pious platitudes, if they are not lived out in practice. Remember Fray what he said, “The good pastor never abandons his flock especially when they are prey to howling wolves on every side, as we are at this moment.” He had his moment and he lived it faithfully to the end, this Fray is your moment. But you decide. We have lived through all this before and no doubt we will live through it again as long as one of the friars. I knew too at that moment that to be true to myself and everything I stood for my answer could only be in the affirmative. She knew that too and had very respectfully but firmly confronted me with the eternal truth of Jesus’ words in St John’s Gospel, ‘No greater love can there be than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’ And true love casts out all fear. It struck me at that moment that it was Mary, the woman who loved much and was deeply loved by Jesus, who was the first recipient of the joyful and astonishing news of the resurrection. Roxanna smiled at me and added, ‘Thank you, Fray.’ ‘On the contrary, thank you,’ I replied.

**Roxanna**

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**25th Anniversary of UCA killings: ‘There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’**

The friends I have valued most over the years are those who love me unreservedly but with discrimination. They are willing to scrutinise me. They make their presence felt by telling me not what I want to hear but what I need to hear at any given moment. Roxanna is that type of friend.

During the afternoon two members of the community went to the diocesan curia seeking food supplies to be distributed among the people. They returned with a letter from the Archbishop recommending that we, the priests, leave the area as he could no longer guarantee our security. But I had made my decision, I was staying.
A Wonderful Afternoon with Blessed Oscar Romero

María Eugenia Iraheta recalls the powerful impression the martyred archbishop had on her as a teenager.

Ciarán Ó Nuanání OFM, a long-time missionary in El Salvador, explains the origin of this article: ‘After a Mass at the Franciscan parish of Soyapango, I asked if someone wanted to say something about Archbishop Romero. This woman, María Eugenia Iraheta, came forward and spoke a little about him. I found what she said to be very interesting and so asked her to write about it. I then translated it into English. Another possible title for the article could be “Romero – the Most Loved and Hated Man in El Salvador”.

I think it is important to begin my testimony by thanking God for the privilege of witnessing the wonderful life of my beloved Bishop Romero; and secondly, thanking my parents who instilled in me the Catholic faith. Especially my dad because he accompanied me throughout his wonderful life, transmitting and sowing in me a seed of love for and a profound discipleship of Bishop Romero, his work, his word and his legacy.

Every Sunday without exception my father used to wake us up (my brothers, sisters and myself) at 5 o’clock in the morning, bathe, dress us in our best clothes, which were prepared on Saturday night, so as to arrive on time for Mass at 6.00am in the parish of San Antonio, Soyapango, where Fr Modesto Villarán was parish priest. The whole family, eight in total, went to this early Mass because at 8.00am we wanted to be back home to listen by radio to the Mass, especially the homily, of Bishop Romero.

I owe to my father this immense love I feel for Bishop Romero, because I remember that he used to place the radio on a table between two beds. He laid down on one bed and I on the other and we stayed there until almost 11.00am, when our beloved bishop concluded his wonderful sermon. But that was not all. After Mass, we commented on the sermon and I used to hear my father express great love for our shepherd.

We also listened to a weekly programme called Voice of the Archbishop of San Salvador on YSAX radio. We were able to follow closely all the activities in which our bishop participated. There was another programme (which, if I am not mistaken, was broadcasted on Wednesday nights) where he was asked questions and he commented on various issues on a national level and informed us of what he would be doing the following week. I was fascinated by these programmes; to hear his voice was great!

So I learned to love, respect, listen to, admire and revere this man of God – San Romero of the Americas!

An October Sunday
I particularly want to share an experience which has had an influence on my whole life. When I was almost 16 years old, on the afternoon of Sunday 8 October 1978, young people from the Basic Christian Communities to which I and my brother Roberto belonged (he is three years older than me) participated in a meeting, a social. At that time the parish was celebrating the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. This gathering was very, very special because Bishop Romero came to be with us. There were perhaps 80 young people present, but there were also some adults. The social lasted about four hours – four wonderful hours!

When our distinguished visitor was about to arrive, we formed a line on each side from the entrance of the parking lot to the parish courtyard, where such a notable event was to take place. We were all very nervous, happy and excited until at last someone shouted, ‘Here comes Monseñor!’ We stayed put, but were eager to meet him. Then we saw him appear as he got out of his small, beige-coloured car and headed for the place where we were to have the meeting. He passed through the two lines and greeted everyone, one
by one! My God, I still have goosebumps when I remember it!

When it was my turn, I do not know what my face looked like, but I recall the occasion perfectly, because he was smiling and looking me straight in the eyes. It was a deep look that permeated to the depths of one’s being, a look that pierced my soul so tenderly. At the same time he was shaking my hand and saying, ‘Hello, how are you?’ My legs were shaking and I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. I cannot explain how I felt! I felt such emotion that I did not know what to say, but I kissed his hand and I’m sure he could also look into my eyes and see the immense love I had for him. It was heavenly!

He wore a black cassock, a purple sash and a skullcap; his shoes looked very elegant. They were black and looked like a mirror, where one could see one’s reflection, they were so brightly and highly polished. I remember every detail because when we walked to the courtyard where the chairs were, my brother and I were in the second row. The bishop was seated a couple of metres from us. On that occasion he was accompanied by Fr Astor Ruiz. He was later expelled from the country, being one of the priests who remained faithful to Bishop Romero.

I did not take my eyes off him, every gesture, every laugh, every tear was forever impregnated in my heart and memory. I was looking at him from head to toe and was fascinated by him. Every word that came out of his mouth was like a fresh breeze whereby God revealed himself, lulled me and let me sense his love. That afternoon I felt I was floating on a cloud. I could see, touch and sense the holiness coming out of every pore of this noble man who had a childlike innocence and purity. I enjoyed every gesture he made and when Fr Astor whispered something in his ear he burst out laughing. They then informed us about what they had said and in that way shared their merriment with us. I realised unequivocally that the bishop was happy that afternoon, forgetting for a while the many problems he had to face.

Indelible Impression
The meeting ended at about 6.00pm and afterwards Mass was offered in honour of our Lady of the Rosary, leaving me (and probably all the rest) with a sweet and special sensation, which I still feel to this day. I also received an indelible impression about the way I should live my life. A photo was taken but unfortunately the friend who took it left the country and so we weren’t able to obtain a copy as a souvenir.

In his diary, referring to our meeting, Bishop Romero wrote on 8 October 1978: ‘In the afternoon I attended a meeting of Base Christian Communities that took place in the parochial convent of Soyapango. It was very interesting, especially the participation of the young people who, in discussion with me, were searching for answers to many interesting questions. The lack of communication between the parish priest and the communities was explained. And I encouraged them to look for a solution that would make this parish a true Christian community, of which the parish priest must be the head. And there must be a very open discussion with him in order to present the Christian witness of a community that truly follows Jesus Christ. We celebrated the Eucharist in honour of our Lady of the Rosary, whose feast day was being celebrated there.’

That is, more or less, the experience I had that 8 October so many years ago with my beloved bishop.
I cannot remain indifferent to God’s plea for our migrant brothers and sisters who experience so much violence, inequality, injustice, and death. By our FMM charism we are called to leave ourselves behind to respond to the signs of the times.

With this motivation I arrived at ‘The 72’, a refugee shelter for migrant persons, to offer my service as a volunteer, giving freely what I had freely received from God. Here around 200 migrants are taken care of daily. Most of them come from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Cuba, and recently from countries of Africa. Seeing the needs they have I would have liked to divide myself up to respond to all, which is impossible.

The Women
I began by attending to the women, who in general are very disheartened because almost all have left their children behind. They had to leave, fleeing organised crime which had made them victims of sexual assault, kidnapping, death threats, and extortion. In general, what forced them to risk their lives in order to save their dear ones was that organised crime groups threatened to hurt their children or close family members if they did not give in to their whims.

Franciscan Sister, Maria Diana Muñoz Alba FMM, spent several months working in a migrant camp called ‘The 72’ in Mexico. The shelter is run by Franciscan friars and is the first stop for migrants who pass through Tenosique, in the southern state of Tabasco, hoping to reach the United States.

The Children
What had a big impact on me was the children’s games. All were related to the persecution of migrants, to rapes, homicidal assaults, etc. This told me of the internal violence these little hearts sheltered because of so many real-life experiences in their country as well as on the road.

I made up my mind to spend as much time as I could with them and promote other types of games that will help ease their anxiety and insecurity so their tender childhood might not be overwhelmed with all that was going on around them.

Though I had the good fortune to be in all the various units of care for the migrants, I was full-time in the juridical area. This involved carrying out migration procedures and also supporting those persons who were victims of any crime, or intervening for those denounced by authorities. This allowed me to put into practice the legal studies I had done and to accompany people in their search for justice and respect for their rights. This permitted me to enter what was most secret, sacred and sorrowful for the person. All this was both a grace and a great responsibility to which, with God’s grace, I was able to respond.
Peace and Light

I recall the question that was continually asked by me; a question I know that was also asked by the volunteers and the migrants, ‘What can you do to be able to sleep and be tranquil after hearing so many terrible experiences all day long?’ For me the answer was always the same, ‘In prayer and the Eucharist I find peace and also the light to animate and strengthen my brothers and sisters.’

Here then was the difference between social work and service as an FMM religious. I had never experienced so much the splendour of the spiritual mission that takes place before Jesus in the Eucharist. Never have I valued so much being an FMM as in this personal space with my Lord, listening together with him to children play, shout, and cry; to women commenting on their experiences in their own country or on the road; or to the men planning how to continue by less dangerous roads.

Testimonies

One day when I was in Palenque it was shocking to encounter a group of five people who had survived an operation by Federal Migration and the police. Some of them had been wounded and others had been ‘disappeared’. When they saw us arrive they ran to meet us. They told me, showing me a New Testament wrapped in paper and a plastic bag, ‘Sister, you see those who are well armed; as for us this is the only weapon we carry.’

Always, in their sharing, the migrants had a word of thanksgiving to God for allowing them to arrive, and for the faith of those who accompanied them along the way when they themselves faltered at times. It was by these testimonies of faith, hope and strength that these migrant people evangelised me.

My time there culminated with Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection. Like the Lord’s disciples I too was sent to announce: Jesus lives in each person who supports life, justice and peace. I thank God from my heart for the call which led me to live this time in ‘The 72’, this call rooted in our charism. I also thank the OFM friars who opened doors for me and gave me the opportunity to serve, despite my weakness, the God with a migrant face.

From ‘Contact’, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary magazine.

For the past six years Mexican Franciscan friar Tomás González Castillo has been running ‘The 72’, a sanctuary for U.S.-bound migrants near the Guatemalan border. The shelter provides cots, meals, and a safe haven to hundreds of young Central Americans venturing to the U.S. each week. Since its founding some years ago the shelter has provided support, protection and company for tens of thousands of migrants who arrive on Mexican soil on their way north.

The journey for these mostly young women and men is often incredibly dangerous. Mostly, these young men and women ride north atop commercial freight trains, facing robberies, rapes, and extortion as they go. Friar Tomás has begun demanding an end to such crimes, calling out the criminal gangs – and, often, the Mexican police – who perpetrate them.

In the chapel hang 72 crosses, each one representing a corpse found after the 2010 San Fernando migrant massacre from which the shelter derives its name. The migrants were kidnapped by the Zetas criminal gang, squeezed for ransoms, and believed to have been assassinated when they failed to follow orders.

‘The 72’ is one of the largest shelters in the country, which has made Friar Tomás a honoured figure among human-rights workers and an anathema to criminals and law enforcement. Over the years, local gangs have threatened to decapitate him, and local officials have accused him of human trafficking.

Last Good Friday, with hundreds of townspeople, Tomás staged an enactment of the Stations of the Cross, with a migrant twist. To play Jesus, they enlisted a sixteen-year-old Guatemalan boy who had arrived at the shelter with empty pockets on his journey north, trying to make it alive to the U.S. Dressed in a long, white robe the boy enacted the crucifixion on the train tracks. Friar Tomás told the Mexican press, ‘To assist the undocumented is not a crime; it is a grace’.

Route: A map of Mexico shows routes to the United States and indicates cartel strongholds.

A Sanctuary

Friar Tomás González Castillo

Feb/Mar 2016
A Chapel in Baghdad
Fr Luis Montes is glad and he has reason to be. ‘We have just consecrated a new chapel. It was high time that our refugees got their own small church. This gives them back a piece of the home they have lost. And the people can now go to Mass without risking their lives,’ the Argentine missionary said. For five years now, the missionary, a priest of the Institute of the Incarnate Word, has been living in Baghdad, one of the most dangerous places on earth. ‘There were 128 bomb attacks in Baghdad last month alone,’ he said, adding, ‘it’s hardly surprising that the people are afraid of leaving the camp to go to Mass.’

Fr Montes is in charge of a camp housing 135 displaced Iraqi Christian families. He said, ‘Because of the danger it was important that the Church came to them in the camp.’ Most of the residents of the camp – which is named after the Virgin Mary – are Syriac Catholics. They fled northern Iraq when the city of Qaraqosh was overrun by ISIS in the late summer of 2014. The majority of these faithful are bent on leaving Iraq for the West. ‘None of them still harbour hope that they will be able to return to their hometowns. After all, there are no signs of liberation. And furthermore, the people have lost their faith in Iraq and in the Arab world in general,’ Fr Montes explained.

Said Fr Montes, ‘The people are suffering. Not all have found work here. In particular the fathers of the families feel useless. However, when I look at our people, I am still looking into happier faces than those in the West. They still have their faith in God. This supports them and fills them with confidence.’

Fr Montes refers to the new chapel as ‘our little container church’. There will be a vigil liturgy according to the Syriac Catholic Church every Saturday night. ‘I only saw thankful faces at the consecration. It shows them that they have not been forgotten, that benefactors in the West are thinking of them. Every sign of solidarity is worth a great deal to them in their situation. And we are all one in the Mystical Body of Christ. What we do for each other becomes a blessing for all. The small church is helping the people here. The benefactors, however, and all believers are blessed by the suffering of these confessors of the Christian faith. They are the true treasure of the Church – one we have to take care of.’

Holy Year and Prisoners
In December the Jubilee Holy Door was opened in cathedral churches throughout the world. A Holy Door for this Year of Mercy was also opened in prison number 39 in the city of Moron, Argentina, by Bishop Luis Guillermo Eichhorn. The celebration was held in two wings of the prison, located in the district of San Alberto, and was attended by many faithful of the diocese, the families of prisoners, faithful of the nearby parish and staff of the penal administration and the detainees of course. ‘Even the door of a prison cell can become a Holy Door, a door of mercy when a pilgrim begs for mercy to God,’ the bishop stressed as he recalled the Christian commitment of charity and proximity to the most abandoned.

In Africa a key aim of Catholics in Malawi during the Year of Mercy is to provide decent living conditions for the approximately 14,000 prisoners in the country, some held in prisons that already fifty years ago were inadequate. ‘A system that dehumanises the person makes him unable to rebuild his life,’ said Fr Gamba, Chairman of the Prison Fellowship Malawi. Among the initiatives promoted by this missionary there is the renewal of the prison in Ntcheu, a job being carried out by the prisoners themselves so that they can ‘live with dignity during detention in order to redeem their own lives’. This is a ‘story that aims to help those who have offended and those who have been offended, in the name of Mercy’, concludes Fr Gamba.

Holy Year in China
The 641 newly baptised in 2015, together with the parish community of Xi Kai cathedral of the diocese of Tian Jin, China, opened the Door of Mercy on 13 December last. As a sign of communion with the wider Church and following the teaching of the Pope, all the initiatives for the extraordinary Holy Year were launched simultaneously on this date: the exhibition on Mercy, the formation of extraordinary ministers of communion, the service to the poor and needy by charity groups, the formation course on the reading of the Bull of the Jubilee, The Face of Mercy, aid to poor families, and regular visits to the homes of the elderly.
**Why Be a Missionary?**

Why be a missionary in South Sudan? Why go far away from your beloved country, far from your family and friends? Why go to a ‘poor’ country without European comforts such as electricity all day long (and not just for two hours a day with a generator)? Or why eat beans, rice, rice and beans most of the time? Why wash yourself, your clothes, the dishes and everything else in the ‘clean’ Nile water? Why sleep under a net to defend yourselves from the mosquitoes? Why live in a country where it’s difficult to understand, at least for now, the language of the people? Why?

These are some of the questions that the people who love me asked before I went to South Sudan, while I was in South Sudan and now again as I prepare to go back. And my answer is, I love my country, I love my family, I love my friends, I love my ‘European’ comforts, really I do! But I felt that I had something to share with other people, especially with those who were suffering for various reasons. I don’t know why, in particular, I felt called to serve the people of South Sudan. I think it was an intuition that I had years ago and I wanted to follow this intuition, to see what God’s plan was for me in South Sudan. So far, I think this is the best I can do by way of an answer as to why I am in South Sudan.

**A Dream**

Now I can introduce myself. My name is Marco. I come from Italy and I joined the Franciscan Order in Assisi, the birthplace of St Francis, in the year 2000. I can say that I had always dreamed of being a missionary. St Therese of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who lived in the 19th century, is one of my favourite saints. She was an enclosed contemplative nun and she was declared patroness of the missions, because prayer is at the heart of the missionary outreach of the Church. I know that I depend very much on the prayers of so many people who pray for us on the mission in South Sudan.

During my years of Franciscan formation I often asked about going on the missions. Thanks to my superior, I had the opportunity of going to different countries for a period of two months each time to experience missionary life, before going finally to South Sudan. I went to Morocco, the Holy Land and Tanzania. In each of those missions, I was aware of God holding my hand helping me to learn something new about myself and about the mission and what it means to be a missionary.

I understood that to be a missionary means to be close to people, to share their life as much as possible, to bring and to receive the presence of God among them. So it’s not necessary to go far away from one’s own country to be a missionary, as I have done. It’s just that some people are specifically called to that.

**Called to mission:**

Marco in Galway last year.

**Italian friar**

Marco Freddi OFM, who studied English in Ireland for some months last year, is a missionary in South Sudan.

**South Sudan**

It’s hard to imagine the reality of life in South Sudan. Before I went there, I had looked up some information on it. South Sudan, officially the Republic of South Sudan, is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is a land-locked country in north-eastern Africa that gained its independence from Sudan in 2011. Its current capital is Juba, which is also its largest city. The population is over 12 million. The statistics for the number of Christians vary greatly. When I arrived, I realised that there was no truth in the statistics since the majority of people in South Sudan don’t have ID cards so they simply don’t exist for the state.

I came to the friary in Galway to improve my English. Even though we are slowly learning the local languages in South Sudan, we also need to have a certain command of English as that is a language that is used a lot also. I am grateful to the fraternity in Galway Abbey for their warm hospitality and their fraternal concern for me while I was there. It was a great joy for me to celebrate Mass each morning with the Poor Clare Sisters. I returned to South Sudan at the end of November.

**I am a Mission!**

Mission is about doing what we can to change things for the better, with our lives and with our gifts. Mission is for everybody, it’s for each of us, not only for those who go far away. It’s for everybody because everybody has their own mission in life or as Pope Francis wrote – everybody ‘is a mission’ on this earth.

‘My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing’ (The Joy of the Gospel, 273).

God bless you. May the Holy Spirit light your mission and your life!!!
From Iraq to Morocco: Hopes for the Jubilee Year

Oliver Maksan of Aid to the Church in Need writes of how Christians living in Arab lands hope to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

The Jubilee Year of Mercy that was solemnly inaugurated by Pope Francis in Rome on 8 December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, is being hailed with joy by Catholics throughout the Arab world – from Morocco to Iraq. The international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) gathered impressions from across the Middle East.

Iraq
Fr Dankha Issa is a Chaldean monk in Alqosh, Iraq. Last summer, hundreds of Christian refugees found refuge in the city after their villages were seized by jihadists. The ancient, exclusively Christian city is situated in the northern part of Iraq. As the crow flies, only about ten miles separate the monastery of the Virgin in the Corn Field from the front line of ISIS-held territory. ‘We are very thankful to Our Holy Father that he has proclaimed a Holy Year of Mercy. It is a time of grace for us,’ the priest told ACN. He himself had been forced to flee Mosul in June of 2014 after it fell to ISIS, or Daesh, as the terrorist organisation is known in Arabic.

Fr Issa said, ‘This Jubilee gives us new hope. Let us hope that this year will extinguish the fires of hate and bring peace. In this year our attention is particularly drawn to how merciful God is with us sinners. God forgives us. But this also means that we have to forgive each other – even the people of Daesh, who have done so many evil things to us. After all, as a Christian you also have to love your enemies. This is almost humanly impossible. But it is easier through faith. God is capable of everything.’

He added, ‘Of course we hope that God will open and soften the hearts of the people of Daesh so that they cease their murderous doings. Let us pray that he will dispel the hate and violence in their hearts and let love take hold.’

The priest’s monastery wants to make it possible for the refugees to experience the mercy of God over the course of the year. ‘We will continue to support them with food and the like. However, we especially want to pray together, above all the rosary. This is what makes it possible for us suffering limbs of the Body of Christ to become one with the universal Church and the Pope.’

Lebanon
In Lebanon, Fr Raymond Abdo wants to use the Holy Year as an opportunity to come up with a Christian response to the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. ‘The people who persecute Christians have to come into contact with Jesus Christ. Mercy thus means not allowing ourselves to hate these people,’ the Carmelite from the northern city of Tripoli said.

He added, ‘We need the courage to pray for them and to love them. Because when they persecute Christians, they do not know what they are doing. This prayer and love is what Jesus did on the Cross. The Church in the Middle East plays a role in many institutions that are visited by non-Christians. We have to love these people and show the mercy of the Gospels to them by example. Jesus did this with the Gentiles.’

In the school in which the priest teaches, 65% of the students are Muslim. ‘Respecting the Muslim students in the same way we respect the Christian students; this is what mercy means to me,’ he said.

Gaza
The Year of Mercy is also receiving attention in Gaza. There are only about 1,300 Christians now left in the area. The number of Catholics is hardly higher than 160. Fr Mario da Silva is pastor for the Catholic parish of the Holy Family. The Brazilian religious from the Institute of the Incarnate Word has been living in Gaza City for several years. During this time he has witnessed several wars.

‘This Holy Year is a big chance,’ he told ACN, adding, ‘We Christians can re-learn what the mercy of God means. This includes re-thinking the reality of sin. We are dependent upon the forgiveness of God. This is an opportunity to find out something new about the sacrament of penance.’

He continues, ‘From the first moment I arrived in Gaza, of course I felt the hatred..."
An ancient church in Lebanon

that the people harbour because of Israeli policies. This hatred is rooted in the injustice the people here experience every day. It may be less pronounced among the Christians because forgiveness belongs to our faith. But of course they also know this feeling. That is only human.

Fr Mario recognises the impact the situation has on people. ‘The wars, the destruction, the high unemployment rate also affects the Christians – all this eats away at the people. However, as a priest I do not feel it is my first priority to change the political situation. That is not in our hands, even though the Church of course draws attention to injustice as such. However, what we can do is to help convert our own hearts.’

Egypt
In Egypt, Fr Beshoi is the priest in Azareia, a Christian town in Upper Egypt near Asyut. The Coptic Catholic cleric wants to make the sacrament of penance more accessible to his parishioners again, saying, ‘We need the forgiveness of God. Here, there are a lot of cases of revenge because of insults to family honour. These are often caused by something trivial. But the situations often escalate until there are casualties.’

He added, ‘And that happens here, even though only Christians live in our town. But they have assimilated the Islamic culture that surrounds us. In Islam, God is only seen as a lawmaker who metes out punishment when his commandments are not heeded. However, I want to change this mentality. I want to show God to my brothers and sisters as a merciful Father who forgives us. However, this is also why we have to forgive each other. Thus, the Year of Mercy has come at just the right moment for me.’

There are a lot of problems, especially among the adolescents in the town. The pastor said, ‘Many take drugs because they feel unloved or misunderstood. I want to show them that God loves them and is waiting for them with open arms. I know that God can work miracles in the souls. Just recently, an almost 60-year-old man came to me for confession for the first time in his life! I hope that I will see many such small miracles over the course of this year!’

Morocco
The Holy Year is also being celebrated at the outermost western edge of the Arab world. Admittedly, there are hardly any Catholics living in Morocco and the vast majority of these are foreigners. However, the small, local Catholic community takes an active part in the life of the world Church. A good example would be the Sisters of the Carmelite convent of Tangiers. ‘We embrace the Holy Year with pleasure and gratitude. It is a great grace that we want to experience together with the entire Church. With all of our poverty and weakness and in recognising our sinfulness, we are on our way to the Father, whose embrace we have need of,’ Sr Maria Virtudes told ACN. The Spanish nun is the Prior of her community.

The Sisters began the Jubilee with a prayer vigil. The Sister said, ‘We prayed to the Lord who is present in the Eucharist. In doing so, we took turns in singing the hymn that was composed for the Holy Year and held long moments of silent worship. As we did this, we were, together with the Immaculate Virgin, in communion with the entire Church.’

Reprinted from Zenit.org

Aid to the Church in Need is an international Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy See, providing assistance to the suffering and persecuted Church in more than 140 countries.
The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy began on 8 December. In the Papal Bull, announcing this special time of grace, Pope Francis celebrates the divine mercy that is at the origin and heart of Christian discipleship.

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8, 16), John affirms in Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus’ entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalised, the sick, and those suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.

Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realised that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them. On the basis of this compassionate love he healed the sick who were presented to him, and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd. What moved Jesus in all of these situations was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need. When he came upon the widow of Nain taking her son out for burial, he felt great compassion for the immense suffering of this grieving mother, and he gave back her son by raising him from the dead. After freeing the demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus entrusted him with this mission: ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you’ (Mark 5:19). The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy. Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo*. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto.

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons. In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.

### Call to Live Mercy

From another parable, we cull an important teaching for our Christian lives. In reply to Peter’s question about how many times it is necessary to forgive, Jesus says: ‘I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven times’ (Matthew 18:22). He then goes on to tell the parable of the ‘ruthless servant’, who, called by his master to return a huge amount, begs him on his knees for mercy. His master cancels his debt. But he then meets a fellow servant who owes him a few cents and who in turn begs on his knees for mercy, but the first servant refuses his request and throws him into jail. When the master hears of the matter, he becomes infuriated and, summoning the first servant back to him, says, ‘Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ (Matthew 18:33). Jesus concludes, ‘So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart’ (Matthew 18:35).

This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father; it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are...
called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.

As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviors that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.

**Tenderness**

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church has an endless desire to show mercy. Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal.

Without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

**An Oasis of Mercy**

The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.

The Church’s first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy. Jesus asks us also to forgive and to give. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity.

Merciful like the Father, therefore, is the ‘motto’ of this Holy Year. In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others.

For the full text of the Papal Bull see www.vatican.va/
A family that almost never eats together, or that never speaks at the table but looks at the television or the smartphone, is hardly a family,' the Pope said at a recent General Audience.

'When children, or even a parent at the table, are attached to the computer or the phone and don’t listen to each other, this is not a family; this is like living in a boarding house!'

His talk was a part of a series dedicated to the topic of the family. 'In family life we learn about togetherness from a young age, which is a very beautiful virtue; the family teaches us to share, with joy, the blessings of life,' he said.

Francis explained that the most concrete sign of this togetherness is when families are 'gathered around the household table'. 'Sitting at table for the family dinner, sharing our meal and the experiences of our day, is a fundamental image of togetherness and solidarity,' he said, explaining that food isn’t the only thing shared at the table, but also affection and the happy and sad events of the day.

'Togetherness, he said, is a ‘sure thermometer’ to measure the quality of family relationships, since ‘in the family, if something is wrong, or if there’s some hidden wound, at the table you see it right away’.

The Pope said that Christians have a special vocation to live the virtue of togetherness, and noted how Jesus made a point to eat with his friends and with those considered outcasts, and even presented the Kingdom of God as a joyful banquet.

'It was also in the context of a dinner where he gave the disciples his spiritual testament and instituted the Eucharist,’ the Pope observed. Because Jesus gave us the Eucharist as a meal, there is a close relationship between families and the Mass. The celebration of the Eucharist is the place where families, drawing from their own experience, open themselves to the grace of ‘universal togetherness and a fraternity without borders’.

Francis said that the togetherness we experience within our own families and in the family of the Church is meant to extend to everyone as a sign of God’s universal love. The Eucharist then becomes ‘a school of inclusion’, where we learn to be attentive to the needs of others.

He lamented how ‘sadly the family meal, this great symbol of togetherness, is disappearing in some societies’. Francis also noted that food itself ‘is wantonly wasted’ in some places, while in others many of our brothers and sisters go hungry.

What the Eucharist reminds us of is that our bread is meant to be shared with everyone, he said, and prayed that the Church and individual families would be concrete signs of ‘togetherness and solidarity for the good of the whole human family, especially during the Jubilee of Mercy’.

‘Let us pray that every family participating in the Eucharist opens itself to the love of God and neighbour, especially for those who lack bread and affection.’
‘See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!’ (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Pope Francis has made mercy a hallmark of his papacy. For Francis mercy is firstly a personal encounter with God’s tender goodness that lifts us up and renews our lives.

The greatness of mercy, not only in our reception of God’s goodness but also in our relation to our neighbour, is the motivation for Francis’ emphasis. It shapes his vision of Church as ‘a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel’.

Pope Francis sees our time as a particular time of mercy. It is for this reason he has announced the Jubilee Year.

In this age of individualism, secularism, and loss of hope, the Pope understands that the Lord desires to reveal the wonders of his mercy in a profound way. He offers this divine mercy to each one of us as a gift and asks us to share this mercy with others.

Francis says: ‘This is the time of mercy. We are called to be a community that has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of our own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy. It is important that we live this mercy and bring it to all areas of our world. Go forth!’

– James Parsons
The Franciscans in Bantry

Pat Conlan OFM looks at the turbulent history of our friary in Bantry, Co. Cork.

The Franciscans have always had reformers wishing to return to the strict observance of the Rule of St Francis. Even at his death the contrast between pragmatism and idealism was dividing the friars. Around 1420 there was a new desire for reform. An older group of friars, later known as the Conventuals, wanted to build big churches beside large friaries where many friars could better serve as many people as possible. The reformers stressed that the spirit must be properly prepared before ministering to people. Later known as the Observants, they preferred small friaries in quiet places where friars could live a life of prayer and penance while serving the groups of people who came to them. The Observants received approval in 1430. The Franciscan Order was split into two, Conventuals and Observants, in 1517.

Foundation
The Observants came to Ireland in 1433. Their first friaries were in Quin in 1433 and Muckross around 1445. They founded new friaries in the Irish areas in the north and west of Ireland. Finighin O’Driscoll received papal permission for two Observant houses in Co. Cork in 1449. The first of these friaries was on Sherkin Island, founded around 1462, for the Observants. Kilcrea was founded in 1465 for the Observants by Cormac McCarthy. Bantry was founded for the Conventuals between 1460 and 1466 by Dermot O’Sullivan Beare. It became the traditional burial place for his family. The other Franciscan house in the area was Timoleague, probably founded by the McCarthy’s around 1310.

David Hiarlaighy (O’Herlihy) introduced the Observant reform in Bantry in 1482. Sherkin and Kilcrea were already Observant and Timoleague would become Observant in 1460. After the split between Conventuals and Observants became official in 1517 David became the second Observant Minister Provincial in 1521-24, and was Provincial again in 1530-33.

Big changes were on the way. The Irish parliament recognised Henry VIII as head of the Church in Ireland in 1536. It passed a bill for the suppression of the monasteries in Ireland in 1537. Sherkin was plundered in 1538. Surprising for a friary in a relatively remote area, Bantry was officially suppressed along with Kilcrea and Timoleague in 1542. This may be due to the decisions of the parliament that met in Limerick early that year. The friars continued ministering in the area.

A map of Bantry in 1558 shows the small friary by the sea. The usual wall surrounds it with a gate towards the sea and the town of Bantry. The church seems to be the typical medieval one running east to west. The altar and choir would have been at the east end of the church. There seems to be a transept to the north, as would be fairly common. The usual slim tower is shown over the centre of the church. The cloister area is not visible since it would have been behind the church in the angle shown on the map. There are houses to the south of the friary.

Persecution
The authorities frequently raided the area during the time of Elizabeth I. English forces occupied Bantry friary in 1580. Two friars were killed: Tadgh Mac Domhnaill, a famous preacher, and his companion John Hanley. They were thrown into the sea and drowned while tied together with their cords or tied to a stone. The rest of the community managed to flee. The property passed into the hands of Sir Cormac MacTeige McCarthy, a descendant of the founder of Kilcrea. By 1588 the friars had returned and lived there for a while.

In the following year the authorities legally seized the friary. It was in a ruinous
state and was priced at the low value of twelve pence. It was granted to Richard Beacon, a native of Suffolk who was active in the plantation of Munster and was a member of a commission to resolve disputes about the plantation. He had just purchased six thousand acres in Waterford and Cork. He was later imprisoned for corruption and abuse of office. He retired to England where he worked for, and wrote on, the need for administrative reform in Ireland.

Daniel (aka Domhnall) O’Sullivan Beare pulled down the remains of the friary to prevent the English using it as a base. He was born in 1560 and became the O’Sullivan Beare in 1587 after bringing a law case against his uncle. He got the full official title in 1594 and had his base at Dunboy Castle. He supported O’Neill and O’Donnell in their fight against the English. As a result his castle was seized and he marched to safety in Ulster in 1602. He was a member of a delegation that met James I in London and went to Spain when this visit achieved nothing. He died in Madrid in 1618. He had every intention of rebuilding the friary in Bantry but this was not possible after his move to Spain.

The Provincial, Donagh Mooney, recorded in 1617 that no friar had been in Bantry for a long time. Cornelius Lynch was appointed Guardian of Bantry at the Provincial Chapter in 1639. This marked the re-opening of the friary. Cornelius is recorded as being a lecturer in philosophy in Cavan in 1647. War broke out in 1641 but the friars in Bantry were able to continue ministering in the area. The coming of Oliver Cromwell to Ireland brought a period of intense persecution. The evidence is that the friars in Bantry went into hiding in the relative wilderness of West Cork. They officially re-occupied the friary in 1661.

**Martyr**

Francis O’Sullivan, probably a native of Bantry, was captured while saying Mass on Scariff Island in 1653. He was killed, probably by having his head cut off by sword. Francis probably had joined the friars in Spain. He finished his studies at the Irish Franciscan College of St Isidore in Rome. He returned to Ireland in 1630 but went to Spain again in 1641 to report on conditions in Ireland. He was back by 1642 and was elected Irish Franciscan Minister Provincial in 1650. He moved to his native Kerry to escape persecution but was captured and killed. His head came into the possession of the O’Connell family of Derrinane who handed it over to the friars in Killarney. It is now a central part of a shrine in his honour in the Franciscan church there. Francis is in the next group of Irish martyrs being considered for beatification in Rome.

The friars living in or near Bantry were not free from persecution. The authorities captured some in 1667. We know that there were two friars resident in the area in 1676. There is a Mass rock, Cúm a’ tsagairt (Coomleigh), near Bantry but we do not know whether it was used by the friars or by the parish clergy. The Irish ‘Banishment of Religious Act’ of 1697 brought difficulties for the friars. They then numbered just over five hundred. By 1800 this number had reduced to 120. Under the Act the friars had three choices. They could obey the legislation by going into exile. Many went to France and took up various ministries there. They could hide their Franciscan identity and work as parish clergy. Even under the penal legislation each parish was allowed one or two priests. Many friars followed this path but can be very hard to identity in official lists. Finally a friar could go into hiding in Ireland. Several did and are obviously hard to find and identify in the record. This seems to have been the case in Bantry.

The friars were still active around Cape Clear area in 1750. The Provincial, in a report prepared in 1766, stated that there was no community in Bantry and had not been for some time. Thus we may place the final end of the friary in Bantry to around 1760.
Minister General’s Message for the Jubilee Year

It is with great joy that, in union with the whole Church, the Franciscan Family celebrates the Holy Year of Mercy. St Francis teaches us that mercy is first and foremost an attribute of God from whom all mercy comes, and it must also characterise our relationships with others.

Pope Francis also writes that ‘the mercy of God is the beating heart of the Gospel’. Surely, we Franciscans who are committed to live a Gospel life must have God’s mercy at the heart of everything we do and say, entrusting ourselves in humility to the Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God. Mercy is the fundamental criterion for how we treat others – to paraphrase St Francis, there should not be anyone in the world who has sinned, however much they may have possibly sinned, who after they have looked into our eyes, would go away without having received our mercy. This applies to all of those with whom we come in contact.

This merciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; as well as being indispensable in education and in pastoral work.

In the coming year we Franciscans also celebrate 800 years of the Pardon of Assisi or the Portiuncula Indulgence, and joyfully remember that God’s pardon is greater than any sin.

Pope in Greccio

Pope Francis made a surprise visit on 4 January to the Franciscan sanctuary of Greccio where, centuries earlier, St Francis created the first nativity scene in 1223. While there the Pope met with members of the friars who live there. He prayed before a 15th century fresco depicting the nativity scene of Greccio on one side, and the nativity on the other.

Earlier in the afternoon, the Pope also met with a group of young people who had gathered for a diocesan youth event in the village of Greccio close by.

The reason for the Pope’s visit was for “personal prayer” according to reports.

The Pope concluded his brief stay in the hillside town at 3.30pm and returned to Rome by car – namely, his Ford Focus.

Cork Poor Clares: At the Poor Clare monastery in Cork, Bishop John Buckley presented Bene Merenti medals to long-serving receptionists Breda Mullans and Joan Twomey for their generous service provided at the monastery for many years. Also pictured are Fr Gerald Garrett and the Poor Clare Sisters.

SFO Jubilarians: A recent celebration in Mullytownham friary honoured Jubilarians of the local Secular Franciscan Fraternity. They are pictured with friars Eamonn O’Driscoll, Liam McCarthy and Lomán Mac Aodha.
For the last eleven years, Friar John Luke Gregory, a native of Sheffield, England, has been working between the two Greek islands of Rhodes and Kos. In recent months, his daily priorities have shifted because of the refugees who have been flocking to the islands by boat from Turkey.

Rhodes is 17 kilometres from the Turkish coast and Kos just four kilometres from it. Refugees have been arriving on the shores of these two islands for some time but since the months of May and June 2015 they have been coming in larger numbers. John Luke said, ‘Local authorities have not put out any official numbers, and I have no idea what they are.’ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated on 2 November 2015 that there was a record number for the month of October, with 218,000 migrants crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe.

‘Greece is only a transit country for them. They are not looking to stay. They know that the economic situation is bad here. The countries that they are seeking to reach are mainly Germany, Austria, Britain or France. The majority,’ continued John Luke, ‘are Syrians, Afghans or Iraqis. There are many women with young children and many young people, a lot of young people.’

‘We don’t know how many of them die at sea,’ he says, ‘the bodies wash up on Kos beaches, which is closer to Turkey.’ In January this year the bodies of 34 refugees, including six children, were washed up on the island in one day.

Every day, as soon as he gets some free time, John Luke goes to the ‘welcome centre’ for the island of Rhodes. Once a week, he goes to the one in Kos, which is a three-hour boat ride away. The Welcome Centre is a large building that island authorities make available to the refugees but it does not offer the necessary amenities to welcome such an influx of people. ‘They at least have a roof over their heads, but the living conditions are very poor, and very, very basic,’ the friar added sadly.

The refugees’ stay on the island lasts from a few days to a few weeks at most. When they arrive, John Luke goes to great lengths to bring them some comfort and provisions. ‘It must be said’, he said, ‘that despite the economic situation here, the inhabitants of the island have been very generous. They are organised. Caritas-Athens does a lot. The hotels provide meals.’

John Luke does not shy away from his pleasantly British accent.

And what is the adults’ reaction? ‘It makes them feel good to speak their own language. In fact, I find that they are not very likely to speak more than a few words of English or French. But as soon as they can express themselves, they talk about everything that they have fled from: war, bombings, fear, closed schools and the fear of Daesh, the Islamic State’.

During the summer, John Luke got the tourists involved. At every Mass, he appealed to their generosity in order to collect hygienic products and money for the refugees. ‘And they were very generous, I must admit.’

His sense of humour and Franciscan spirit cannot hide John Luke’s concern over this ocean of misery that is engulfing the Greek coast, a misery that he tries to help assuage, for a few days, or even for a few hours, because the love of Christ compels him so.


For his part, John Luke has two concerns: human dignity and the children’s smiles. For the first one, he makes every effort to provide the refugees with basic hygiene products: soap, toothpaste, shampoo and clean clothes. As for the children, he gives them sweets and little toys. ‘These children have been moving around for weeks, and they may not understand everything that is happening, but they need to be able to breathe some fresh air in the midst of this distress.’

John Luke looks at them smiling, and gives them what he has brought and asks them to tell how they’re doing. But what language do you use to speak to them? ‘Arabic, of course!’ Imagine the astonishment of refugees welcomed in Greece by an English Franciscan who speaks to them in Arabic. ‘It makes a lot of children laugh when I speak to them in Arabic because to them I have a funny accent!’ And it’s true that whatever language he speaks – which he usually speaks very well, and he speaks seven languages in addition to English – Marie-Armelle Beaulieu writes of English friar John Luke Gregory, a member of the Custody of the Holy Land, who finds himself caught up in the refugee crisis facing Europe.


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**Context Counts**

When Jesus preached the Kingdom of God to his own Jewish people he did so in a land under Roman occupation. That caused no few problems.

When St Francis listened to the urgings of Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, that the holy places in the land of Christ should be won back and missionaries sent to Muslim lands, he obeyed. He succeeded in going to Egypt in 1219 with the help of a Crusader ship. There was no other transport. This journey led to his historic encounter with Sultan Malek-el-Kamil.

Blessed Charles de Foucauld was once an officer serving in the French army during the 19th century North African campaign. He agreed with the broad aim of French policy to civilise and christianise. He later became a priest and immersed himself in the cultural and physical world of the Tuareg people in the Southern Sahara. He was the first to write their language, compose a French Tamahaq dictionary, and so forth. He was killed 100 years ago in 1916.
Such simple examples show how we must all live in a given place, space and time. We have our own mindsets. We live ‘in the limitations of weakness’ (Hebrews 5:2).

A Dutch historian, Huyghens, once studied the collision of cultures, as in colonial settings. He concluded, ‘The bee fertilises the flower from what it sucks.’ Yes, there is give and take, gain and loss. Some great people transcend the rigid conditionings of their times, like the ‘universal brother’, Charles de Foucauld.

**Our Subject**
I have made these opening remarks in order to invite you, the reader, to come with me to a California before the gold rush. That territory was then part of the 18th century Spanish Empire ruled from Mexico and Madrid.

Columbus discovered the New World about 1492. This unleashed immense energy among the Portuguese and Spanish reaching out to Asia and the Americas. The Spanish established New Spain in a vast area covering the southwest of North America, Mexico City being the operational centre. The first Viceroy was appointed in 1535.

New Spain was almost 200 years there when Juníper Serra was born on the island of Majorca in 1713. The priests he knew were the Catalan Franciscans so he came to join the Franciscans Order aged 17. He quickly became a professor of philosophy and a renowned preacher on this island, also the birth place of the great Franciscan Ramón Lull.

But, in order to renew his vocation, he volunteered for the mission and left Spain in 1749. A text describes him, ‘He was 35 years old, of medium height, swarthy, dark eyes and hair, slight beard.’ With him went his one-time student Francis Palóu. This friar would share all his labours, outlive him, and write his first biography in 1787.

Serra was no doubt aware of the great Jesuit missionary, St Francis Xavier (1548-1610) who had gone to Africa, to India and then to Japan. But the real inspiration was the Apostle of Latin America, St Francis Solanus OFM (1548-1610) who had left Spain when he was 40 years old bringing his violin with him – music was to be a magical connection with the Indians in Peru as it would be for Serra in his mission work.

**The New World**
Twenty friars and seven Dominicans embarked on a ship sailing from Cadiz. The long voyage was no picnic but they reached Puerto Rico and finally Vera Cruz on the Mexican mainland. Serra and a companion opted to walk all the way to Mexico City taking in the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe en route.

**Mission Carmel:** where St Juníper died and is buried.

Fr Antonio Llinás OFM had founded Colegio de San Fernando in Mexico City in 1733. It was to be a centre to train missionaries as well as being an administrative headquarters. Serra and his friar friend went there. But after a few months he and Palóu were dispatched to the Sierra Garde region, north east of the city. The Augustinian missionaries in that area had severe tensions with both military and settlers. The friars came in their place to serve the Oropame people. Serra resided at Jalpan Mission with oversight of the other missions from 1750-1758. He reportedly became fluent in the Ponga language.

Events overtook him. Other friars were working in what is now Texas with the Apache people. But on 16 March 1758 a Comanche raiding party destroyed Mission San Salía and two friars were killed. Orders came to replace them and the two seasoned missionaries, Serra and Palóu, were ordered to prepare to go to Texas. But then the Comanches attacked a nearby military fort killing 20 soldiers. The mission did not reopen. Serra never went to Texas.

**California**
Another new situation arose when the superb Jesuit missionaries in the peninsula of Baja (Lower) California were expelled by order of King Charles III of
Spain. They had actually established 17 missions on the peninsula between 1697-1769. They had been very much in control of the region which is part of Mexico today. Once again the friars under Serra and Palóu were sent in. Serra settled at Loreto Mission in 1768 with his friend Palóu nearby.

It was not to be for long. The Russians were exploring Alaska and the Spanish authorities decided to move the frontier up north into what is now California State. It was called Alto California. Serra and his friars handed over the peninsula missions to the Dominican friars and joined the expedition which went by land and by sea to Alto California.

This was his dream come true for Serra. At long last he was now a mature, gifted and seasoned 58 year old; he sought to preach the Gospel to unevangelised peoples. He always referred to the Indians in his writings as the Gentiles, following the Bible. Our authors remark, ‘Serra was of course embedded in an elaborate, complicated and often violent colonial project that stretched back almost 300 years. Indeed Serra helped direct the beginning of the final expansion of the Spanish frontier.’ Fair comment!

The Missions
Serra established a mission in San Diego. He was used to the scene where missionaries, soldiers and settlers interacted with the local people. He was determined to avoid exploitation of the Indians by soldiers and settlers. His missionary policy would be paternalistic. The Indians were encouraged to move near the mission and to learn agriculture, ranching, crafts, etc. The friars sought to baptise young people who could learn Spanish and be a bridge to their own people. The mission was the meeting point of Spain and the Gospel with the people. A fort (præsidio) would be nearby and frontier town (pueblo) eventually. But not if Serra could help it!

Serra wrote a diary of the trek to San Diego and his many writings are mainly from the final phase of his life; for example, correspondence with officials in Mexico City, Colegio San Fernando, and fellow missionaries.

‘When I give them something to eat, they usually tell me with very clear gestures that they don’t want that. Instead, they want me to give them my holy habit and grab me by the sleeve. If I had given the habit to all who requested it, I already would have a large community of Gentile friars. What I would like to instil firmly in their hearts is, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14). May the most generous Lord and Father who clothes the little birds with feathers and the mountains with grass, speed such a day.’

Many, many different Indian tribes lived in that vast area, over 1,000 miles of coastline. The friars will go on to string a ladder of 21 missions from San Diego to Sonoma by 1823. Nine of these were founded when Serra was in charge and nine more during the time of his successor, Francis de Lasuén OFM.

Each tribe had its own language and customary way of life. Serra and his friars were trailblazers, first-contact pioneer missionaries. They lived rough and had to reach out and somehow say hello to the Indians who by and large were friendly.

Encounter
One day Serra was in a Spanish travelling party when they were met by some Chumash Indians. The weather was terrible and the Chumash just carried Serra over the muddy hills. ‘I was not able to repay them for their efforts or their act of compassion.’ He did his best to interact with them. ‘When I was able to sing a large crowd of them would happily join in and accompany me. When I stopped I blessed those who had helped me; this served to deepen the compassion I have felt for them for some time.’ The Chumash were a developed people and Serra would later delight in founding Mission Santa Barbara in their midst – not without opposition.

Our authors comment, ‘For Juníper Serra this encounter on a stormy day symbolised what he hoped to achieve in California. The natural bond between the Chumash and Spanish, with one group seeing another in need and spontaneously offering to come to its aid, was the foundation of the kind of evangelisation he hoped to carry out along the Pacific coast. Serra hoped that this human touch would allow contact and dialogue and that California and its native peoples would gradually come to understand and accept the truth of Christianity... Serra believed he could respectfully and successfully spread the Christian Gospel among the indigenous peoples with whom he had freely chosen to spend the rest of his life.’

To be continued…

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St Anthony Brief
Wisdom for the Journey

When I arrived in El Salvador as a deacon in 1984 (I was 27), the civil war was still raging. The very next day I was taken around the parish. Many people had been displaced as a result of fighting in the countryside. At one stage we noticed a crowd gathered near a dump. We approached the silent crowd. They were looking up at a semi-naked dead man hanging from a tree, with obvious signs of torture. At the dump I was unaware that the mother of the victim was present, unable to claim her son’s body because of fear of reprisal. As I prayed that night and reflected on my first day in El Salvador, I committed myself to doing all in my power to try to prevent such a thing happening to at least one other human being.

The expression ‘Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation’ encapsulates for me the call to live in right relations with myself, with others, especially those who are poor, as well as with the whole of creation and ultimately with God.

One of the most important insights I have gained in my life is this: healing and relationships are central to the missionary vocation. Let me give you the background to this. A fellow Irish friar in El Salvador shared the view that developing right relations was the best contribution he could make to mission. It’s about living and facilitating relationships: with oneself, with others, with the poor, with creation and ultimately with God. Most problems originate in a breakdown in right relations. Much difficulty begins with an inability to love and accept oneself. The more ‘hurt’ or ‘pained’ a person is, the greater the likelihood is that he/she will hurt or cause pain to others. Thus, as I say, healing relationships is central to the missionary vocation. The challenge then is to realise this and begin our own journey back to wholeness and healing.

We are all to a greater or lesser degree autistic, preferring fixed daily routines, becoming dependent on rules, uncomfortable with change. I would note here that autism is a lifelong developmental disability. Some can live relatively everyday lives; others need lifelong specialist support. People with autism have difficulty in social communication, interac-
tion and social imagination (knowing what others know/think). Jean Vanier, founder of l’Arche, believes we are all ‘wounded’ in some way.

The autistic syndrome highlights a more generalised phenomenon today, an inability to relate in a healthy and significant way to oneself, to others, to creation and ultimately to God.

Contemplation

There are pivotal ‘attitudes’ that we need to develop or strengthen so as to face the challenges in the world and in the Church constructively.

Contemplation first: it’s about listening, becoming aware. It is a way of being in the world rather than a way of avoiding the world. It is the way to be present to ourselves, to others, to creation and to the God of all. Do we really know how to listen? Most of us don’t listen well. If we don’t listen we can’t hear – ourselves, others, creation or God.

Increasingly we are too busy, stressed and tired to dedicate quality time to others. Most of us are addicts! An addiction is anything that controls us, consciously or unconsciously, deadening our ability to focus and be attentive, not only to the other but even to our own real needs.

Gerald May, if my memory serves me correctly, defines an addiction as an attachment to something (a person, an idea, a thought, a project, a feeling or dream), possibly even good in itself, which mistakenly substitutes for what leads to fulfilment and happiness. Through a series of unhealthy attachments we lose touch with our true selves and ultimately with God.

Listening to Myself

From 1984 until 1998 I lived in an ‘inserted fraternity’ in a poor barrio and worked as parish priest and formator of young friars on the outskirts of San Salvador. They were exciting times, influenced by Monseñor Romero’s vision of lay participation coming from the Second Vatican Council. It was a way of living the triple ministry of Jesus, including the social, economic and political dimensions, despite violence and poverty.

One of the big lessons I learned about listening or rather about ‘not listening’ was when two friends from Ireland came to visit. They both were doing MAs in Mater Dei Institute, Dublin. After a stressful day on our way back to my house, walking ahead with brisk determination, one of the women shouted, ‘You’re very tense, aren’t it was upsetting me or causing me great difficulties. I was just keeping my head down and hoping I would come out ‘on the far side’. The new insight led me to become more proactive about looking after myself at every level, so as to be able to serve people better.

Time Alone

As part of this I realised I need to find time to be alone. Every few months I’d go to a hermitage. A first sign my body was relaxing was when I noticed my nails growing!

This moving apart became a very important mechanism for renewing my spiritual and physical batteries. When I returned to parish and fraternal life I noticed I was more present to myself, more present to people, more efficient; I got more work done.

Most people just want to be heard: they solve their own problems. Many tend to jump in with unhelpful suggestions mostly because we are uncomfortable with silence and think we are expected to provide solutions.

Studies have found that a compassionate listener can have a greater healing influence than a professional with all technique but no heart. This does not negate the importance of a professional approach to helping people with problems, but just points out the simple though not obvious requirement, the most crucial ingredient in any healing relationship: love and care for the other.

Unresolved Issues

During that war in El Salvador I experienced many shocking things and accompanied many traumatised people. In fact, the post-war violence there is even more intense.

Some fellow friars have post-traumatic-stress syndrome (PTSS), which can cause serious anxiety and physical illnesses.
With professional help some have worked through the pain, successfully integrating it into their lives.

Others have chosen to leave things alone. I tend to believe that if we don’t deal with something now, it will deal with us later. I can only presume that many missionaries, unknowingly, suffer from post-traumatic-stress syndrome. Unresolved issues not only affect me but generally have negative consequences for those we live with and to whom we minister. Many superiors and community members are unaware of PTSS. But now opportunities are available for healing. Still, we need to take measures collectively to prepare for and deal with causes and symptoms of PTSS and other related illnesses arising from our vocation as missionaries, in order to be free to spread the good news of liberation and freedom, particularly to the poor.

A Contemplative Stance
Karl Rahner once said, ‘The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.’ He intuited what is most essential for human well-being. Openness and communion with the Source of life brings healing and peace.

The person needs to develop a ‘contemplative stance’ today. At the heart of Western mentality is a dichotomy between mind and body, spirit and matter, contemplation and action. As missionaries we tend to consider ourselves activists for the Kingdom. We may pray individually, together with our fellow missionaries and with the people, but are we ‘contemplatives’?

Michael McCabe SMA believes that one of the challenges for missionaries is to develop a contemplative spirituality.

Unless the apostolic activity is helped by a ‘profound listening to the Spirit’, this activity can lead to ‘activism and arrogance’ – something which has marred the modern missionary movement.

The ‘contemplative stance’ is about becoming aware of the presence of God’s Spirit within and around us, in the activities, ups and downs of our lives and those of others. The contemplative does not confine God to a chapel, or a sacrament, a church, or any place in particular. The contemplative learns to feel for the movement of God’s Spirit in the ordinary and extraordinary events of life and in the events of the world around her/him.

The contemplative does not just depend on specific prayer times to be with God, although s/he is faithful to these times, but knows these precious ‘times apart’ are really moments of preparation to meet God in the unexpected and the ordinary events of life. The contemplative realises that prayer is all about listening and not about asking. It is about searching for orientation through the maze of life and its challenges.

Adapted from an article in ‘Religious Life Review’, Jan-Feb 2016.

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Feb/Mar 2016

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ORDINATION
IN
HARARE

Blessing: Fr Salicio Mukuwe blesses a Sister after his ordination to the priesthood in Harare recently. We pray that the Lord will grant him many years of joyful and fruitful service among God’s people.

Feb/Mar 2016
Minister Provincial, Hugh McKenna OFM, and Liam Kelly OFM recently spent time in Zimbabwe.

The church being built at Nharira.

VISIT TO ZIMBABWE

Above left: Hugh with Sisters Gladys, Evangelista and Josephine.
Above right: Liam and Patience Tigere OFM at Gandachibuvuva mission.
Below right: Divine Mercy church being built in Harare.
Below left: Liam and Hugh.
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