

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

As the news was spreading about the 75th anniversary celebration of the presence of La Salette in Burma in November of 2012, I was already dreaming and praying to be part of this historical event. Very Rev. Fr. Silvano Marissa, the General Superior and two of his councilors, Fr. Joe bachand and Fr. Efren Musnji represented the GERALD of the Missionaries of La Salette from Rome to take part oin this solemn celebration. Frs. Jack Nuelle, Pete Kholer, Bill Slight and myself travelled to Myanmar from the United States. Frs. Rosanno Sorriano and Sal Pico came from the Phillippines. Then there was a group of about 20 Filipino friends of Fr. Bernie Taylor, the first Burmese La Salette that came to Manila and Santiago City, Isabela to witness this remarkable event. We participated in the 40th priesthood anniversary celebration of Fr. Bernie Taylor and witnessed seven young Burmese men professing their temporary vows in religious life. We were able to visit three major cities; Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan. I would like to share with you some of the highlights of our visit to Manmar in this issue.



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For more than a century, Myanmar remained a world apart, isolated from other nations due to foreign and military rule. The UN recognizes the name Myanmar as the nation's official name since 1989. Myanmar with a population of 50 million people is a fascinating country. Buddhism is practiced by almost 90% of Myanmar's population. There are other religions in Myanmar, but they are not as widespread as Buddhism. Only 4% of the people are Christians and 4% Muslims and the rest are Hindus and other minor religions. Christianity was brought to Myanmar by European missionaries in the 19th century.

On November 8th, we gathered with more than 50 priests from the area-dioceses and hundreds of people in an open pavilion adjacent to the Marian Shrine of the Our Lady of the Rosary in Chanthagone, where the Burmese La Salettes started to minister in 2005. We celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Priesthood of Fr. Bernie Taylor. In his homily Fr. Bernie said that the essence of priesthood is to be of service to others. He continued, "On the day of my ordination I recognized that my priesthood was not for myself but for others and that it was to be a life of service to the people of God." He gave thanks for the people in his life those who shaped him - his friends, most especially his family and the La Salette Community. He recalled the difficulties and struggles he had to go through in order to become a La Salette missionary. He said, "I joined the La Salette Minor Seminary in Akyab (now Sittwe) in 1962 and was sent to the Philippines the next year. However, since I was still living in Burma I was not able to get to a La Salette Novitiate so I finished my theological studies and was ordained for the Diocese of Prome (now Pyay). The La Salette missionaries in Burma had to leave the country so I worked in the diocese of Prome. Finally after 20 years I was able to finish my novitiate program and took my vows in 1982. God had a plan for my life." He is proud of the fact that the Burmese La Salette mission has grown without limits and bounds. Now there are 12 Burmese La Salette priests and a few other in formation. Fr. Bernie looks back with pride and gratitude for everything that happened to re-establish a La Salette presence in Myanmar. He thanked everyone who supported him during his priestly journey for the past 40 years and asked them to continue their prayers for him and the continued growth of the La Salette mission in Myanmar. After the solemn celebration of Mass and a sumptuous meal

for everyone who attended there was an evening of dance and music followed by presentation of gifts for the celebrant, Fr. Bernie. It was a very enjoyable evening with lots of fun and entertainment.

The next day an even larger crowd gathered under the same pavilion at the shrine compound in Mandalay to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the La Salette mission in Myanmar. In his message, Bishop Alexander, the Bishop of Pyay said, "We come together to thank the Lord for this great occasion. The first La Salette missionaries went through hardships and pains and even death but they have proclaimed the Word of God with courage and handed down the legacy of faith in this land of Myanmar, particularly in the diocese of Pyay. We continue to thank the Lord for His guidance, for bringing back the La Salette missionaries to Myanmar through Fr. Bernie Taylor as the pioneer. Is it not the power of the Holy Spirit that prepared him to recruit some fine Myanmar young men to become missionaries?" He said proudly, "There are 12 native La Salette missionaries in our midst here in this little village in Chanthagon, where they have their base. We are all God's missionaries today. At baptism, we are given a lighted candle and the priest said, Receive the light of Christ. We are all sent out to proclaim the good news to all people that Jesus Christ is the light of the world." The Bishop quoted Pope Benedict XVI, who at his regular public audience on October 17, 2012 said, "Christians today often do not even know the central core of their Catholic faith or the basics of their faith. Ignorance about the fundamentals of faith leaves believers vulnerable to certain forms of syncretism and religious relativism, with no clarity about which truths must be believed and the salvific uniqueness of Christianity." Then the bishop concluded, "In this year of new evangelization and the Year of Faith, let us be open to renew our own faith. Let us be ready to

follow our Mother La Salette and be obedient to follow the command of our Lord. Through the intercession of Blessed Mother, may God bless you with His peace and joy." At the conclusion of their Novitiate year, seven Burmese brothers took temporary religious vows during this liturgy before their beloved parents, brothers and sisters, and their friends. Seven fine young men, gifted and blessed, choose to live in chastity, poverty and under obedience in this world of ours. When they made their vows, at the very moment when they offered themselves, body, heart and soul to the Lord, they were transformed into such beautiful beings. They chose to surrender everything they possessed to embrace a humble life style of "poverty, chastity and obedience" with total submission to their God in response to His call of sacrificial love. Through this act of consecration, they were embraced by God. Their hearts echoed with joy and peace. The radiant beauty I witnessed on their faces was indescribable, so much so that I was gazing at them in awe! I could only praise God and thank Him for calling them, setting them apart for His divine plan. As we pray for more vocations, let us also pray for ourselves, that we courageously respond to God's call to give ourselves unreservedly in the service of His people.

The only property the La Salettes own in Burma consists of an acre of land with a mid-size house on it. This served as the Community House until the novices needed a place for their formation. So they converted this house into a novitiate formation house and 7 novices occupy it with their director, Fr. David Kyaw Kyaw. Other priests stay in the parishes where they are assigned. We were invited to the Novitiate for a special ceremony where Fr. Silvano Marissa inaugurated and blessed a mini-facsimile of the La Salette apparition that was recently built in front of the Novitiate House. Then we returned to have dinner.

We also had the opportunity to visit a couple of the rural parishes run by the La Salettes. They are Myauk Kine Parish and Myitnge quasi-Parish, both not far from Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Shrine in Chanthagon. As we drove into the parish compounds people gathered around us with great smiles and welcomed us. They were overjoyed by our presence as it was the first time so many foreign visitors came to these interior villages. The La Salette missionaries are very well loved, appreciated and respected by these simple village people.



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Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:

North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.