

Stories from Asia



Advent and Marist Solidarity 2007

*Bureau of International Solidarity (BIS)
Marist Brothers' General House, Rome*

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Advent 2007

This year's reflection booklet focuses on our Marist Mission Ad Gentes Project. Over the course of the next four years, as many as 120 Marists, brothers and lay, will be moving into Asia to advance the mission of St. Marcellin Champagnat among poor children and young people. The process has begun. By the beginning of Advent 2007 two groups of brothers will have already completed their preparation period in Davao, Philippines and will working to establish a new Marist presence in Asia. A third group of brothers will be nearing the end of their preparation period and will be getting ready to join those Marist missionaries already in Asia.

In his letter announcing the Marist Mission Ad Gentes Project, Br Seán Sammon, our Superior General, reminded us that "as an Institute we are missionary by nature." Our Constitutions and Statutes call us to *have a missionary attitude like Father Champagnat who affirmed, "We are ready to work in every diocese in the world."* Our move into Asia, while it may be seen by many as dramatic, is a way to live out our identity as Marists, an identity we can point to in over seventy-five countries around the world.

Besides the scripture reading and the closing prayer which come, for the most part, from the liturgy of the day, this year's Advent text is built around two additional elements: personal reflections written by the brothers who attended the first two sessions of the Ad Gentes formation and orientation program in Davao and Bishop Tagle's address to the Asian Mission Congress held last year in Thailand, *Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus*. We believe that the "missionary stories" of our brothers and the reflections by Bishop Tagle on the significance the Church in Asia places on the "telling of stories" when evangelizing will make for some fruitful periods of prayer during this season of Advent.

We pray you find this year's Advent reflection text a useful resource for prayer. Please remember our brothers, and our Institute's efforts to rekindle its missionary spirit and the needs of the Church in Asia. God's blessings on you this Advent season.

In prayer and solidarity,

Br. Dominick Pujia, Director
Ms. Sara Panciroli, Communications
Br. César Henríquez, Child Rights Advocacy Officer
Ms. Angela Petenzi, Projects Coordinator

Production and Lay-Out:

Br. Dominick Pujia, BIS Director
Ms. Sara Panciroli, BIS Communications

Translators and Editors:

Br. Carlos Martin, General House
Fr. Edwardo Camagnani, Diocese of Rome
Br. Aloisio Kuhn, General House
Br. Luis Richard, France
Br. Jean Rousson, France
Br. Fabricio Galiana, General House
Br. Ross Murrin, General House
Br. Gerry Brereton, USA
Ms. Gabriela Scanavino, General House
Mr. Luiz da Rosa, General House

Proof Readers:

Br. Ross Murrin, Australia, General House
Br. George Fontana, USA, Manziana
Br. Noel Hickey, Perth, Australia
Br. Joseph De Meyer, Belgium, General House
Br. Pedro Ost, Brazil, General House
Br. Pau Fornells, Spain, General House

The brothers who participated in the Davao Orientation Program (Sessions 1 & 2):

2 December	Br. Gerard Brereton, Province of the United States of America
3 December	Br. Santos García, Province of Norandina
4 December	Br. Hugo Rivera Herrera, Province of México Occidental
5 December	Br. Anthony M Njolovi, Province of Southern Africa
6 December	Br. Marti Enrich Figueras, Province of L'Hermitage
7 December	Br. Patrick Betkou, Province of Madagascar
8 December	Br. Francis Attah, District of West Africa
9 December	Br. Brian Kinsella, Province of Melbourne
10 December	Br. Hilario Schwab, Province of Cruz del Sur
11 December	Br. Michael Potter, Province of New Zealand
12 December	Br. Vigilio Bwalya, Province of Southern Africa
13 December	Br. Ewald Frank, Province of West Central Europe
14 December	Br. Miguel Vielva, Province of América Central
15 December	Br. Félix Roldan Rodríguez, Province of Santa María de los Andes
16 December	Br. Bernard Tremmel, Province of West Central Europe
17 December	Br. Antonio Sánchez Lozano, Province of Compostela
18 December	Br. Miguel A. Sancha, Province of Ibérica
19 December	Br. Maria Antony Jeyaraj, Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan
20 December	Br. Paul Hough, Province of Sydney
21 December	Br. Francisco Javier Peña de la Maza, Province of México Central
22 December	Br. Ramon Serra i Cubí, Province of L'Hermitage
23 December	Br. Andrew John Sikelo, District of Korea
24 December	Br. Geoff Kelly, Province of Sydney
25 December	Br. Richard Roy, Province of Canada

Special Thanks to:

Br. Tim Leen and the Davao Program Leadership Team for their assistance with making this year's reflection booklet possible.

Charity: soul of the mission

Unless the mission is oriented by charity, that is, unless it springs from a profound act of divine love, it risks being reduced to mere philanthropic and social activity. In fact, God's love for every person constitutes the heart of the experience and proclamation of the Gospel, and those who welcome it in turn become its witnesses.

God's love, which gives life to the world, is the love that was given to us in Jesus, the Word of salvation, perfect icon of the Heavenly Father's mercy.

The saving message can be summed up well, therefore, in the words of John the Evangelist: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (I Jn 4: 9).

Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI

World Mission Sunday 2006

December 2

Sunday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 2: 1-5

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

“The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains.”

Similarly, the story of Jesus, of his life and unconditional love for all God’s children, has been described as the greatest story ever told - one of turning strife into peace.

When a story emerges from our experience it carries with it a hidden dynamic all its own for peoples, cultures, religions, and arts worldwide. It is remembered long after school days and books are forgotten.

With the dawn of Advent, as Christ’s followers we find ourselves with a new opportunity to make plans for celebrating the story of Jesus, our risen brother and God - his bursting forth into human history and even more astonishingly calling each one of us by name to be his apostle - to set out for places near and far and tell of his burning desire to bring harmony and God’s peace to this age boiling with ethnic conflicts and religious tensions, consumerism, media-hype, migrants, and interfaith dialog.

The closer we draw to Jesus in our daily lives these days, the more encouragement he will give us to tell, retell, and model his words, deeds, and service for people who do not know him, to hand on his story to them, work together to build communities marked by his peace and joy, to show compassion, befriend the “other,” carry our crosses, and witness to his presence among us; to endeavor to fill our homes, neighborhood, country, and world with his Holy Spirit of peace.

As a fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire, so Christ's peace can only be generated by those who themselves are imbued with that peace.

This Advent let us fervently pray to draw closer to Jesus and work together to enkindle his peace on earth.

*Br. Gerard Brereton
United States, Province of the United States of America
Davao - Session 1*

It can be said that the history of the Church is the history of mission. This multilayered and multi-colored history, dating from New Testament times, testifies to the many ways by which the Church has understood and practiced mission. We can add the fact that while the one Church is universal it exists in local Churches that have quite unique histories and situations, and therefore quite unique experiences and notions of mission. Pope John Paul II affirms in *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) a basic insight of *Ad Gentes* (AG)¹ that mission, a single but complex reality, is developed in a variety of ways.² In continuity with the Church's dynamic search for ways of doing mission appropriate to specific times and places our congress proposes an understanding and practice of mission focused on the Story of Jesus in Asia.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good, that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From "Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus"*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* 6.

² Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 41.

December 3

Monday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Matthew 8: 5-11

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

Humility and faith go hand in hand. I would say that there is no creative, deep, and loyal faith without a sincere and spontaneous humility that cries out to us from the most profound conviction: *Say but the Word and my servant will be healed.*

Humility in my life presupposes taking on many risks, many discomfoting situations. It presupposes looking upward, from below, from my humility. *Lord I am not worthy that you enter my house.*

Frequently, my humility, having become faith and life in those around me, leads me to forget my own hopes, troubles and anxieties to focus on everyone else: *Lord, only say the word and my servant will be healed.*

Often I behave like a "child" when a problematical situation or routine difficulty turns up. I close my eyes, as if to say "if I don't see it, it doesn't exist." I ask myself, "Why is the world like it is - with wars, misery, hunger, disease, illiteracy, widespread poverty, children and young people adrift without society paying any attention to them? Why do people leave their homelands? Why are there broken homes?"

The centurion came up to Jesus with a plea. He took the initiative in starting a dialogue. *Don't go out of your way. Just say the word and my servant will be healed.*

Faith, humility and dialogue: requisites for the Lord to come and dwell in us. I ask myself during this Advent Season:

- Do I really want the Lord to come to my house?
- Why, for what purpose, and in what way do I want the Lord to visit me?

- To be healed? Of what?

I think about my mission as a Marist apostle and hear Jesus saying to me: *Go and let it be done as you have believed.*

Once more faith speaks to me of a path, of displacement, of the value and splendor of humility.

The Lord is on his way, I have to go out to meet Him. And the one the nations have been expecting, the Messiah, will enter my house because I have believed.

*Br. Santos Garcia
Spain, Province of Norandina
Davao - Session 2*

A story is never just a story. A story is truly a story when told or narrated, and hopefully listened to. Nowadays, one of the names of story telling is sharing.

In *Ecclesia in Asia* (EAs), Pope John Paul II describes mission as sharing the light of faith in Jesus, a gift received and a gift to be shared to the peoples of Asia.³ That sharing can take the form of telling the story of Jesus. I believe that story telling provides a creative framework for understanding mission in Asia, a continent whose cultures and religions are rooted in great stories or epics. Pope John Paul II also recognizes the narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms as a preferred way of proclaiming Jesus in Asia (EAs 20).

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord, our God help us to prepare for the coming of Christ your Son. May he find us waiting, eager in joyful prayer. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

³ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* 10.

December 4
Tuesday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Luke 10: 21-24

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

I want to share with you a personal experience I had in a small town up in the mountains of Buda. The town, called Kahusayan, is situated in the northeast part of the Philippines. I was there for an immersion experience living with poor people. Kahusayan is the place where the Word of God, expressed in the Gospel of Saint Luke, 10:21-24, struck me so forcefully.

After getting off the bus, I was welcomed by two couples from Kahusayan village. We had to walk for an hour and a half, and they insisted on carrying my bag. We crossed the same river several times, and the bridges were so fragile that I was really scared. Finally we arrived at the home of Pedro and Rosalia where I stayed the whole week. It was really amazing because I did not speak the Bizayan language and they could not speak English. As a result, we both made a great effort, I to learn some words in Bizayan, and they some English . . .

Pedro was not only the man of the house; he was also the lay minister of the village. As a result, he had the responsibility at the Sunday celebrations of preaching the Word of God. He spent a lot of time every night preparing the homily, since there was no priest in the village. On the Sunday I was there, Pedro invited me to share his homily. Not only did I prepare the homily, but I also prayed that the Lord would put on my lips the words He wanted me to say to the people. Thank God, there was a young girl who knew English quite well and she was my interpreter.

Only now have I begun to understand the expression, “Poor people evangelize us” Pedro’s homily was about God’s love present in the mountains of Kahusayan and in the daily life of the people. Pedro’s words could easily enter into their hearts because he was one of them.

Why was it so easy for them to get in touch with God? Because of their simplicity! Yes, Lord, now I understand why you said, “I thank you, Father, because you have hidden these things from the wise . . . and you have revealed them to poor people.” Lord Jesus Christ, in this Advent time I pray that you would come into our hearts as you so naturally seem to do among the poor people of Kahusaya.

Marana tha! Come, Jesus, come!

*Br. Hugo Rivera Herrera
Mexico, Province of México Occidental
Davao - Session 1*

Understanding “Story” and Telling Story

Human life is unimaginable without stories. Life itself has a narrative structure. Story mediates life and its meaning. Telling stories comes so naturally to us that we do not reflect sufficiently on its significance for our lives. In recent years, scholars have been rediscovering the role of narrative in their respective disciplines. Theology and spirituality have benefited from this “turn to the story.”⁴ Mission can equally be enriched.

Let us devote some time to reflect on story and storytelling. My presentation will be far from exhaustive. As an invitation to further reflection and discussion, this paper will dwell only on those aspects that might have a bearing on understanding mission as telling the story of Jesus.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

God of mercy and consolation, help us in our weakness and free us from sin. Hear our prayers that we may rejoice at the coming of your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

⁴ An example among many is Michael L. Cook, S.J., *Christology as Narrative Quest* (Collegeville, MN: 1997).

December 5

Wednesday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
– *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
– *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Matthew 15: 29-37

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

When I reflect on Jesus' cure of the lame, blind, deaf and handicapped, it makes me wonder at the Lord's marvels. Today we have so many sick people who would like to be cured of their physical sickness. Any cure that our Lord performed required that one who was asking the cure have faith in Jesus. That is the difference between so-called magic powers used by some traditional healers and the miracles of Jesus. Medical doctors, through their ability to diagnose and heal people are a sign of Jesus' healing action today.

The second human need is for food, shelter and clothing. Jesus also responded to these types of needs as, for example, when he fed thousands of people. In war-torn parts of the world, the victims of war lack shelter, food and clothing. Several organizations send workers to such countries and thereby assist in giving aid to those who are suffering or to those who, as refugees, have fled the war zones. The people who work for such aid organizations are moved by love and compassion. The work of Jesus is still being carried out in the world.

I am happy to see that there are several non-governmental organizations which work through religious institutions in order to give aid to the needy. Trust is built up by means of such people who work for God's cause, as they bring love, hope and even the chance to profess faith in Christ.

We need eyes of faith to recognize Jesus' presence in these activities. Jesus is alive today. Jesus is present in our world. Jesus is in the street children, refugees, victims of war, abused women and children, those who are homeless because of natural disasters, in everyone who believes.

When Jesus feeds the multitude, he does not look at tribal differences. All of those whom he feeds are his disciples; they have come to listen to his preaching and teaching.

I remember when I was preparing for my First Communion. The priest who was preparing us made use of the Scripture passages that talk of Jesus' miracles, like that of feeding the multitude. It was interesting because he presented the material to us in story form. You know: in African culture, when a story is being recounted, everybody responds, "Tili tonse," meaning "We are together." In this way, we appreciated the Gospel passages, especially the ones about the miracles which Jesus worked. However small the action done to a friend, the action is never forgotten.

*Br. Anthony Michael Njolovi
Malawi, Province of Southern Africa
Davao - Session 1*

Good stories are based on experience

There are good stories and bad ones. But the difference does not always depend on the style of the narrator or the ending of the story. Ultimately we want a credible story, a story that is believable because it is true. The strongest basis of truth is the first hand experience of the narrator. While credible reporters of somebody else' experience can be believed in, nothing matches the story of someone who actually was there when an incident happened, for the event is now a part of the person. We tell our best stories when they are about our experience. Our best stories are about who we are.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord our God, grant that we may be ready to receive Christ when he comes in glory and to share in the banquets of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

***From "Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus"***

***Closing Prayer of
the Day***

December 6

Thursday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Matthew 7: 21, 24-27

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

In order to vary today's meditation and make it a bit more interesting, I thought that, instead of *writing* the text, I would stick a 100 Euro bill on this page of the Advent booklet. As it happened, however, my budget would not allow me to put that much. Consequently, I am simply writing the following: "I am giving you 100 Euros!" You see how easy that is! I have already written it. And doing so has not cost me very much; in fact, it has cost me nothing. "I am giving you 100 Euros!" Yes, I will repeat it, "I am giving you 100 Euros!"

How easy it is to speak, to write! How easy it is to draw, to shape, to build on sand. But how short a time such things last!

Now that interactive programs are booming, will the Gospel become something antiquated for us? Is the New Testament a book simply for reading, and nothing more?

Reading today's Gospel gives me the impression that we are standing before an "interactive book," like a cookbook, a musical score, a treasure map or a set of blueprints. What use does a cookbook have if the recipes are not prepared? What is the use of a musical score if the notes are not played? What value do we give to blueprints that are never transformed into a building?

Jesus warned us, and in today's Gospel he warns those who listen to him: "No! These words are not a simple text, poetry, a piece of beautiful writing, precious parables to give pleasure to those who read them or comment on them . . . No! The words have to be put into practice! They have to be lived!"

If you ask me why I became a Marist Brother; why the experience of four work-mission camps in Tanzania had so strong an impact upon me; why I have offered to go to a third-world country; why I accepted the challenge of the Mission Ad Gentes in Asia; to answer such questions, I would surely need to seek responses in the Gospel. I would have to admit that I begin to “savor” the Gospel only when I try to live it, to implement it. I would surely refer to the numerous persons I know who have allowed themselves to be moved by the Gospel beyond “merely good intentions.”

If I allow the Gospel to touch me, challenge me, question my way of acting, have an influence on my decisions, change my life, I am starting to BUILD ON ROCK.

*Br. Marti Enrich Figueras
Spain, Province of L’Hermitage
Davao - Session 1*

Stories reveal personal identity and people and events that shaped that identity

Stories reveal who we are, the flow and sense of our lives and where we are going. My story is my autobiography, my identity in the great scheme of things³. As I tell my little stories, my fundamental life story is revealed not only to the listener but also and primarily to me, the narrator. I make sense of myself. But I realize in the process that the story is not simply about me. It is also always about other people, my family and friends, society, culture, the economy, or what we call ‘the times’. My story is not developed in a vacuum. I am what I am because I am immersed in other people’s stories and the stories of my time. If I neglect or deny them, I have no personal story to tell. In telling my story, I make sense also of the world I inhabit.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father, we need your help. Free us from sin and bring us to life. Support us by your power. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From “Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus”

Closing Prayer of the Day

³ Cf. Richard Woods, O.P., “Good News: The Story Teller as Evangelist,” *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 206.

December 7

Friday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 29: 17-24

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

In the beginning, the Good News was preached in the land of Asia by Jesus Christ, himself an Asian. For many reasons, Christianity was not so developed on this continent, but God has His plan and is using missionaries to preach His goodness and love for the whole world. Two thousand years on, Pope John Paul II expressed a clear vision which, for me, seems to be a prophetic call to the Church. He invited the entire Church to come back to Asia, a continent where two-thirds of humanity lives. Led by the Holy Spirit and recognizing this sign of the times and its importance, our Institute has decided to become fully involved in spreading the teaching of Jesus on his own continent.

In this third millennium, the approach of a missionary must be different. Why? We believe that God is already present in the place where we are going. He welcomes His own missionaries. One is reminded of the experience of Moses, when, from the burning bush, God called him. The initiative is always from God. The task of missionaries is to recognize His presence in people, their cultures and their milieux . . . and to help people become aware of that presence and to accept the love He has manifested by sending His only Son as Savior of the world.

As Christians, we are called to be missionaries, both "Ad Gentes" and "Inter Gentes." Asia has its own rich spirituality. In being called to this new mission and in making the rounds of our daily activities, we need to keep in mind that we have two major tasks: ministry and mission. The mission must be rooted in the heart of the Holy Trinity. Our mission is to evangelize, to make our Lord Jesus known and loved. Now more than ever, the world needs the witness of spiritual people: "spiritual fathers" and "spiritual mothers," people possessed by the Spirit of God, people of the Word of God, people who have a passion for God and a passion for others. In our mission, more effective than doing is *being*. So, wherever we go on mission, we must keep in mind God's words to Moses, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5).

In this twenty-first century, God is remembering His people in Asia. He is sending missionaries to reveal the value of His Word to his sons and daughters who dwell on the continent. Looking upon this “holy ground,” the missionary must be involved, valuing the dialogue of life, culture, religion . . . Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would always accompany his messengers. The Spirit of God is at work, and the Spirit will touch and transform the hearts of people, so that Asians will ever more praise and rejoice in God’s wonders and His love for them. Therefore, we, Marist Brothers, are doing our best to contribute to building the Church in Asia and helping it to have an “Asian face.”

*Br. Patrick Betkou
Madagascar, Province of Madagascar
Davao - Session 1*

Stories are dynamic, open to reinterpretation and re-telling, and transformative

Personal identity is shaped by interaction with the world put into memory. Remembrance is vital if we want to grow in self-knowledge. But we remember by telling stories.⁶ Memory is made of stories rather than mere chronology and stories bring experience back to mind.⁷ By remembering, we realize that the past is not at all static. It continues to mold us. It can also be seen in a new light from the optic provided by new experiences. In fact we tell the same story in different fashions. Stories reveal what made us what we are now while differentiating us from what we were before and opening possibilities for the future. Through stories we get in touch with the dynamism of transformation of personal identity: how much we have changed and how much more we have to change.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Jesus, our Lord, save us from our sins. Come, protect us from all dangers and lead us to salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

⁶ Ibid. p. 205.

⁷ Cf. Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S., “Preaching and the Imagination,” *Bible Today* 38 (2000): 289, 292.

December 8
Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Saturday, First Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Luke 1: 26-38

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

Tamlang is a rural village southeast of Davao del Sur on the island of Mindanao, Philippines. The village is situated in a remote, mountainous area without access road, pipe-supplied drinking water, electricity or healthcare facilities.

The recent immersion experience in Tamlang, at Don Marcelino, left me with all kinds of mixed feelings. The plight of these poor, indigenous, Blaan people has had a marked effect on me.

Among the many experiences I had in Tamlang, one still remains vividly in my mind, the one which occurred through the agency of an eight-year-old girl named Jobilyne.

While I was teaching English to the Grade One class at the Filipino Tribal Apostolate School in Tamlang, I invited Jobilyne to come to the front of the class to do a little demonstration. To my surprise she would not face the class from the place where I wanted her to stand. Several attempts were made to help her change the position, but she did not move. I later realized that she had some big holes at the back of the clothes she was wearing and did not want me to notice.

In recent times, the concept of poverty has attracted a lot of debate and subsequent definitions by sociologists. Some schools of thought believe that poverty is a relative term, and they go on to say that sometimes those we call "poor" do not know or feel that they are poor.

My experience with Jobilyne convinced me that the poor are perfectly aware of their state; and the fact is, they do not like it. They really long for a change or for a better condition of life; but they are trapped in the web of poverty. One thinks of Saint Paul's cry, "Who will deliver me from this wretched state?" (Rom. 7:24).

Marty Haugen, a contemporary Catholic song writer and composer expresses the same sentiment in his song, “Who Will Speak?”

*Who will speak if we don't?
Who will speak if we don't?
Who will speak so their voice will be heard?
Oh, who will speak if we don't?*

Mary's acceptance of God's invitation to be the Mother of Christ is also a call to all of us to make Jesus known and loved. Like her, let us accept the call to be agents of the Good News, to spread the message of love, justice, peace, sacrifice and friendship with the unfortunate ones in our societies.

*Br. Francis P. Amoako Attah
Ghana, District of West Africa
Davao - Session 1*

Stories are the ground for understanding spiritual, doctrinal and ethical symbols

Stories disclose personal identity by surfacing the values, moral norms and priorities of a person. The spirituality of a person emerges in his/her story. Ethical, spiritual and doctrinal symbols precious to a person are derived from that person's life stories. Those profound living symbols are understood only when the story is known and heard⁸. Stories are indispensable to the meaning of a person's faith and moral symbols.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy mother of your Son. You let her share beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring by his death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Help us by her prayers to live in your presence without sin. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

From “Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus”

Closing Prayer of the Day

⁸ Cf. Cook, p. 31.

December 9

Sunday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

My name is Brother Brian Kinsella. I am from Australia and have been privileged to be in the first group of Brothers to prepare for Mission ad Gentes in Davao, the Philippines. During this time there have been many experiences; and as I put pen to paper, the time here is coming to a close, and future appointments are becoming clearer.

In today's reading, Isaiah highlights for me aspects seen in this land of contrasts, especially where we wait for a time when a person "shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth."

Alex's Story

During the program, the Brothers spent some time living with rural families. I lived with Alex and Gingging and their three-year-old daughter near Buda in the mountains north of Davao. I would like to tell you a little about their life. Alex is a farmer; he grows vegetables in the Balakbakan barrio. All his life he has worked someone else's land; and, in his own words, he lives from hand to mouth. He was forced to leave school at the end of year eight for financial reasons. He is an intelligent man who enjoys nothing more than a "sweet conversation."

Alex relies totally on the good will of his landlord. If the landlord decides that the land is useful for some other purpose, Alex will have no alternative but to move out and search for a new home and employment. Like all farmers, Alex is dependent on the weather and the productive nature of fairly marginal, stony ground.

The family lives in a small two-room house with no electricity. They would consider themselves lucky because Alex has been able to install a plastic pipe that runs from the mountain spring to the house. The daily routine follows the sun.

The possibility exists that a foreign company may purchase large amounts of the land in the area for a banana plantation. This will have consequences for the future of all the members of the community.

Alex has dreams for the future. He would like to have his own home; he would like a better future for his daughter. He despairs of the lack of a political voice for the poor. In his dreams are present all the things that we all would like to have in our lives. Perhaps they are even amplified or possibly more pure because they are not clouded by other things. Alex wishes for a future filled with love, family, friendship, community, simplicity and God.

So where is this taking us at this time of Advent?

In spite of the economic and financial situation of Alex and the other families of the area, there is great faith in this God for whom we wait. For Alex there is an unshakable faith that God cares for him. He feels that there will be a righteous judgment of the poor of the earth because within the community chapels of this mountainous region, the earth is full of the knowledge of the LORD. The deep faith - that God loves and cares for them - is clear.

As we experience waiting for the coming of Jesus to us this Christmas/Advent, I ask that you pray for Alex and all the poor of this world that the world be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, that we learn “*not to judge by what our eyes see, or decide by what our ears hear, but with righteousness judge in favor of the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.*”

*Br. Brian Kinsella
Australia, Province of Melbourne
Davao - Session 1*

Stories form community

What we have said so far about story and personal identity is also true of the identity of a community. Common experience and memories bind unique individuals into a cohesive body. The narrative privileged by a community becomes the nucleus of its values, ethics and spirituality.⁹ A community's distinguishing beliefs, rituals, celebrations, customs and lifestyle will make sense to us only if we go back to the stories that the members of that community hold and cherish in common.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

God of power and mercy, open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy, so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

⁹ Cf. Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J., “The Mediating Role of Narrative in Inter Religious Dialogue: Implications and Illustrations from the Philippine Context,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41 (2004): 164.

December 10
Monday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Luke 5: 17-26

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

"Some men brought a paralytic ..., and they lowered him from the roof . . . in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven . . .; get up and walk . . .; and all were astonished and glorified God."

The friends carry the paralytic and they, as it were, are carried by him to Jesus. In response to their unspoken mediation and their active, ingenious, expansive and provocative faith, Jesus goes to the heart of the matter: he forgives the sin and makes all of them capable of walking in liberty. All feel loved, forgiven and freed by the compassionate and merciful love of the Father.

We can find a lot of paralysis in daily life: physical, affective, moral, spiritual, and psychological: forms of paralysis which need help, as does a young man named Narciso. The nineteen year old Narciso went to school until the age of twelve. Today, with deep sores on his back, Narciso is in a wheelchair, paralysed by a bullet that hit his vertebral column. The Missionary Sisters of Charity working in Davao, Philippines take care of him with faith and love. Narciso makes rosary beads from wire, and he always smiles when you visit him.

Sometimes I take care of his sores, and I feel profoundly humanized and closer to the Gospel of Jesus: "*What you have done to the least . . .*" I experience compassion, solidarity, powerlessness, gentleness, revolt, love, anger at those who caused this, and the presence of the Lord. I suffer seeing the future of Narciso mortgaged, nearly without hope. What can I give and receive from so many others?

This Advent invites us to leave our own “comfort zone,” as we situate ourselves before the “Lord who comes.” If I do not leave such a position of comfort, I do not see, I do not feel, I do not react, I do not love. Would we be capable of creating a friendship with people in need so as to experience in them the love and the presence of the Lord who comes? What paralytics can I find during this Advent? How can I experience in them the redeeming presence of the Lord?

*Br. Hilario Schwab
Argentina, Province of Cruz del Sur
Davao - Session 1*

Stories when received can transform the listener

Important experiences are named and told in stories.¹⁰ When we experience something positively or negatively significant, we cannot wait to tell it to someone. This dynamic tells us that story begs for a listener, for someone with whom to share. One’s story can awaken memories of similar experiences in a listener, open new meanings, create wonder and shake from slumber. The engagement and response from the listener begins when the narrator concludes.¹¹ The narrator’s story is woven with the listener’s story to produce new stories. Usually a good listener will become a good storyteller. The one who has experienced weaving other person’s stories into one’s own by listening will be secure enough to share one’s story as a thread in someone else’s story.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord, free us from our sins and make us whole. Hear our prayer, and prepare us to celebrate the incarnation of your Son, who lives, and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

***From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”***

***Closing Prayer of
the Day***

¹⁰ Cf. Bayuk, p. 289.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 290.

December 11
Tuesday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Isaiah 40: 1-5

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

I met Tangging and Alejandro while attending the Davao Mission Ad Gentes Orientation program in Davao, on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. They are members of the Lay Marist Movement of the Marist Family in Davao. Among the many things they do, they are committed to working with inmates at the Davao City Jail. This jail houses over 1000 inmates all waiting for their court hearings.

In the reading from Isaiah today we see that preparation for God takes place in the desert, where few resources are found and where survival is a daily struggle. The reading also says that "from the hand of Yahweh", i.e. on God's initiative, repentance and reconciliation are possible. I am sure these words have special meaning for Tangging and Alejandro.

In the midst of the stress associated with prison life, Alejandro and Tangging give witness to God's presence. They visit the prison on an almost daily basis, offering pastoral assistance, arranging liturgies, preparing inmates for the sacraments, providing material assistance where possible, organising sports tournaments and setting up small projects to enable the inmates to use their time profitably and also to generate a small income so they can support their children or themselves while they await trial. Together with the inmates they work to "make straight" and level the wastelands, mountains and cliffs that stand in the way of the revelation of Yahweh's glory. Where inmates, some of whom have waited for over ten years to have their cases heard, might have good reason for despair, these companions ensure that the light of hope continues to burn for them and for their families.

The Eucharist, Reconciliation, the Way of the Cross during Lent, and the patient waiting which characterizes this season of Advent all take on extra symbolism when experienced from inside jail. Tangging and Alejandro ministry is unique in that they offer their help to all, regardless of faith or creed. It is a small contribution to the value of dialogue and mutual respect on this often troubled island. Is it not the type of ministry to which Christ, through the Beatitudes, calls us all?

*Br. Michael Potter
New Zealand, Province of New Zealand
Davao - Session 2*

Stories can be told in a variety of ways

A story can be told in many ways, even when not literally telling a story. Oral narration is still the most common. But stories can be told through writing letters, novels or poems. Photographs and video productions are technologically inspired ways of telling stories. A person's gestures, mannerisms, tone of voice, facial contortions, and body postures are as present as any character in a story. A person's silence can be a powerful way of telling a story. By extension, a person's attitudes, lifestyle and relationships tell stories and generate new stories. A community's dances, music, art, architecture, and food are essential elements of its story. Stories are so richly textured that they are open to many ways of being narrated.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Almighty God, help us to look forward to the glory of the birth of Christ our Savior: his coming is proclaimed joyfully to the ends of the earth, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From "Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus"*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

December 12

Wednesday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Matthew 11: 28-30

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

“Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you”.

Advent means “coming” or “arrival” and is characterized by the spirit of expectation, of anticipation and of longing. Expecting, anticipating and longing can at times be stressful and depressing. We become weary and life itself is seen as burdensome.

Who are the weary? Who are these people who find life burdensome? The word “weary” implies being physically or mentally exhausted by hard work. A weary person is overstrained, has lost patience and hope and is dissatisfied with life. “Burdensome” implies a severe test of body and spiritual strength. It is associated with both physical and mental hardship.

The men and women who toil day and night for a meager salary, the child on the streets feeding from rubbish tins, the mother watching her baby die slowly due to lack of money for medical fees, people displaced by war, the thousands of people with no jobs, children having no access to better education and health etc., these are among the weary and the burdened whom Jesus is calling, “Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you”.

Here in Davao, on Saturdays I go to a rehabilitation centre for juveniles, where kids in conflict with the law are kept. Many come from broken families. Poverty pushed them to be in conflict with the law. In a mountain village we visited not long ago, I met a mother, burdened by life, watching her son die slowly because she lacked the money needed for medical fees. In the same village I saw children who had no access to education and good health.

As missionaries who hear Jesus' call, let us go and live among the weary and the burdened; and together we'll move towards Jesus.

*Br. Vigilio Bwalya
Zambia, Province of Southern Africa
Davao - Session 2*

Stories can be suppressed

Even if telling stories comes spontaneously to us, some factors can suppress storytelling. The pain brought about by a traumatic memory, shame or guilt can prevent a victim from telling his/her full story. In order to preserve a bit of dignity after a harrowing experience, a victim can deny that a story is part of his/her personal identity and memory.

Dictators forbid stories of corruption, oppression, killings and destruction from being told, lest their regime be put into jeopardy. They bribe media people and threaten those who want to expose the truth. They impose an official national history that erases memories that would put them in a bad light. Some stories are too dangerous to tell, for listeners might hear the call for transformation. The fiercest battles being waged daily are over stories.

But healing is possible. Where victims are allowed to tell their stories to friends, counselors or professionals who show compassion and understanding, their self-worth slowly comes back. Where communities reclaim their true story, they reclaim too their power for societal change.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Almighty God, help us to look forward to the glory of the birth of Christ our Savior: his coming is proclaimed joyfully to the ends of the earth, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 13

Thursday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 41: 13-20

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

During my orientation course in Davao, I spent one week living with a fisher family at the shore of Padada along the Gulf of Davao, Philippines.

When I heard from our team that, for the immersion part of the program, I was to be assigned to the fisher people, I felt quite comfortable, because the assignment reminded me of my first mission experience in Kenya about twenty years ago. I was sure the experience would be similar.

One time, when we had been fishing for two days, and our catch was not very successful, I was disappointed because the Lord had not given us enough fish. We had only four kilos, a catch worth around 200 Pesos, about three Euros. The family with which I was living was very poor, as are most of the people in this village. In the family there are two grown-up girls, one eighteen years old, and the other twenty. Although the youngest one had finished high school, she was obliged to pause for two years until her elder sisters finished college. This family did everything it could to give the children a good education. Many of the families in the village cannot send their children to school because they lack the money necessary to pay school fees.

My host-family has a small house with a kitchen inside. The floor is just earthen soil, because the family cannot afford to buy cement to build a proper floor. They have two dogs, four hens, two cocks, ten chickens and two cats. They have no garden because nobody would give them a piece of land.

At least they had electric power, but there was no running water. The sea water they cannot use because it is salty. Nick, my host-father, told me they can get drinking water twice a week at a nearby well between 10 p.m. and 1 a.m.

Nick is usually fishing during the day. At night he has to get up to fetch water. At 3.30 in the morning, however, he is already on his way to start fishing again. As I experienced life with these people, I learned a lot. I learned not to complain.

*Br. Frank Ewald
Germany, Province of West Central Europe
Davao - Session 1*

Mission as Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia

At the outset, we affirm with *Ad Gentes* of Vatican II that the pilgrim Church is missionary by nature because it takes its origin from the mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the saving will of the Father (AG 2). So that what Jesus has accomplished for the salvation of all may come in time to achieve its effect in all, He sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to carry out His saving work inwardly and in the Church (AG 3-4). It is therefore just fitting to call the Holy Spirit the principal agent of Mission, as Pope John Paul II does (cf. RM, chapter III). It is the Holy Spirit that enables the Church to accomplish the mission entrusted to it (EAs 43).

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Almighty Father, give us the joy of your love to prepare the way for Christ our Lord. Help us to serve you and one another. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From “Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus”

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 14

Friday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 48: 7-19

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

We can ask ourselves: What was our experience in the first years of our life with teachers in so many places where we travelled? Isaiah, in this "Book of Consolation", offers us the image of God as teacher, and equal to our image of God as Father, the two are united in our first experiences.

We are certain of one thing: God is a teacher, even more, an educator. And to raise consists in helping to grow, in accompanying, in being beside. Let's look a little around us, and in our own history. Who has accompanied us, has helped us to grow? How have they done this, with gestures, signs, being present and with words? Our responses will help us to understand and to come closer to this God Educator, God who shows us the way, this way towards the good.

Allow me to make a small reference to an experience in the Philippines. In the city of Davao, the Marist family (fathers, sisters, laypeople) carry out an apostolate in a psychiatric hospital. This consists in visiting the sick and participating in the Eucharist and in works of animation with them. At the end of the celebration, the young people visiting the centre are invited to come back again, and those who are doing so for the first time share their experience. It is recommended that all be older than eighteen years of age, a question of security.

I have seen a young couple, members of the Marist laity, who were with a child, their son, aged about eight years. This grabbed my attention and I asked the reason for this. The response was: "It is good that he learns from an early age that our life is to help those who are in need."

To educate has a principal objective according to the text, to educate for the good. And the good is the very identity of God. To educate in order to be like God, and to procure the good of others. Let us thank our Lord for the gift of being educators and let us live this with fidelity and creativity.

*Br Miguel Vielva.
Spain, Province of América Central
Davao - Session 2*

From this perspective, the missions of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can be considered God's own story. God is the "teller of the tale".¹² The Holy Spirit will tell the story of Jesus to the Church. Jesus promised, "the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). The three persons of the Trinity are even depicted by Jesus as "telling stories" to one another. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak...He will glorify me for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (Jn 16:13-15).

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

The Church's mission is a fruit of the Story that the Holy Spirit declares to it from Jesus and the Father. The origin of the Church's mission is the Great Storyteller, the Holy Spirit, to whom it must listen so it can share what it has heard. The Church is God's Storyteller of Jesus Christ as it listens to the Holy Spirit.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

All-powerful God, help us to look forward in hope to the coming of our Savior. May we live as he has taught, ready to welcome him with burning love and faith. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer of the Day

¹² Cook, p. 39.

December 15

Saturday, Second Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
– *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
– *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

After having meditated on this passage from Isaiah, my heart and my mind took me to the indigenous community of Linawlawan, a marvellous place hidden among the mountains on the island of Mindanao, Philippines. Examining this countryside again in memory, I thought of certain circumstances which had provoked my admiration, inspiring in me a profound respect for, and appreciation of the place.

There was the smile of the children and their open countenance; there was the simplicity that envelops and transforms all those whom it touches. There was the quality of life and the relationships among the people, their prayer lived and shared each Sunday in a chapel rustic in structure but intimately welcoming. Finally, there was the memory of the children and adolescents who used to play together until the setting sun would disappear behind the mountains.

Ernesto is the name of the teacher at the small community school and a messenger of the Word which is alive and active. Ernesto, animated as he is by a profound faith and an unlimited confidence in the God of life, becomes a mediator for me. Through him the Lord has chosen to reveal His presence to me in this milieu where the role of the State is more shadow than light.

Ernesto's words resonate strongly within me, inviting me to set aside my certitudes, my present lived out as key to the future, my fears and hesitations, my reasoned faith. As a consequence, I may be able to discover the true face of the Father, revealed in each of the people with whom I share this privileged moment which He has granted to me without any merit on my part.

This special moment brings with it the chance to embrace, even physically, the suffering face of God. The powerlessness felt before what I cannot change, and the pain felt before the injustice of such situations have strongly touched the most sensitive fibres of my Marist heart. Anthony, a fourteen-year-old boy, is the living image of so many adolescent (and even younger) Filipinos - and those from other parts of the world - who, for want of a good education, have but the rarest occasion to advance themselves. Anthony's personal reality challenges me to take risks, to constantly move ahead, to be each day more committed to the cause of the poor, especially young people and children, because so much is lacking for the Lord to be able to reign in our world. At the same time, Anthony's youthful countenance also radiates hope. The echo of his voice, gently enfolded by the mountains, travels each pathway of the valley which is home to the Linawlawan people, finally to arrive at every corner of the world: Yahweh alone is the one who consoles and saves His people.

It is the Good News announced by the messengers of peace: like Ernesto, like you, and like me.

*Br. Felix Roldan Rodriguez
Spain, Santa María de los Andes
Davao - Session 1*

That the Church should tell the story of Jesus goes without saying. The great question for Asia is how to share the story, as Pope John Paul II accurately points out (EAs 19). The 'how' aspect of the mission has been the concern of many Asian theologians, like Michael Amaladoss, S.J. Using some of our reflections on the understanding of story, let us look at mission as telling the story of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord, let your glory dawn to take away our darkness. May we be revealed as children of light at the coming of your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From "Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus"*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

December 16

Sunday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Isaiah 35: 1- 6; 10

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

Do you know the beauty of your own country? Have you ever experienced the feeling stirring through your whole person when nature is at its best, and you wished the experience would never stop? It happened to Isaiah; it happens to people all over the world; it happened to me.

Of course we know: there are those living in misery who experience only their "tired hands" and "knees trembling with weakness," the "blind and lame" and the marginalized. And often enough they are "discouraged" because they do not see help or encouragement. We know about such things, feel pity, and even pray that some kind of improvement may occur. Somehow, however, we feel paralyzed, unable to do anything. Among the fisher-folk of Padada in the Philippines I felt the apathy of people who, even if accustomed to suffering, do not know how to change the situation. Seeing such conditions made me angry.

Yet there is this unbelievable prophecy of Isaiah that "the desert" and the deserted will sing and shout for joy. The situation, no matter how chaotic, will turn into "happiness for ever." How is it possible? How can it happen? Isaiah, the mouthpiece of Yahweh, tells us, *comma here*) "God is coming to your rescue." How wonderful: God himself is coming! When you live with the fisher-folk, you know that God is not going to come flashing down like a lightning bolt to "punish your enemies." You recognize that there is only one way to make God become reality: through your hands, your feet, your head, your heart, your whole person.

In the Gospel, Jesus pronounces this word that may embarrass his hearers, “Sell everything and give it to the poor.” In some old horror stories, people sell their soul to the devil. Why should not we, the followers of Christ, “sell” ourselves wholeheartedly to the cause of the poor? Of course, we are free to make our own decision, but the beginning of “freedom from sorrow and grief” for everyone, the arrival of God in our world - the meaning of Christmas itself - becomes reality only through a generous answer.

This is my wish for Christmas: that my anger about the injustice may be transformed into an action that is blessed by our God, newborn in the world.

*Br. Bernard Tremmel
Germany, Province of West Central Europe
Davao - Session 1*

The Church tells the story of Jesus from its experience of Jesus

Telling the story of Jesus in Asia is more effective if it springs from the experience of the storyteller. Pope Paul VI’s observation in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*¹³ that people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers is universally true but more so in Asia where cultures put particular emphasis on the experientially verified truthfulness of the witness. The earliest apostles, who were Asians, spoke of their experience - what they have heard, they have seen with their eyes, they have looked upon and touched with their hands concerning the Word of Life (I Jn 1:1-4). There cannot be any other way for the contemporary Church in Asia. Without a deep experience of Jesus as Savior, how I can tell his story convincingly as part of my personal story? The experience of St. Paul is truly the root of mission when he says, “it is not longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Telling the story of Jesus in Asia requires the Church’s living encounter with Jesus in prayer, worship, interaction with people, especially the poor, and events that constitute the “signs of the times.”

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord God, may we your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ, experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

¹³ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41.

December 17

Monday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

James 5: 7-10

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

Timanan is a place in the Philippines, in a mountainous area in the south of Upi, an Island of Mindanao. It is very far from the bustle of the cities. The Marist Fathers have a community there and they look after the parish of Our Lady of Salvation.

The locality is inhabited by a population that is practically fifty percent Moslem and fifty percent Christian. The presence of the Marist family is recent, since June 2005. Previously the parish was under the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who made it a life-giving centre of activity in an environment that was not very favourable to Christians.

Confronted with some tense moments, "they were patient." One, a priest, was illegally detained by a violent faction linked to the Moslems. He had been threatened and attacked on a number of occasions. Due to his detention, he was obliged to abandon the parish along with the sisters who worked in the mission. Services to the Christians were maintained, however, by the Oblates until the Marist Fathers arrived. Today, there continues to be tension on one hand and reasons for hope on the other.

One day during my insertion experience, someone planted a bomb which luckily did not explode. The people attributed the attempt to a certain sector of the MILF (Moslem Movement for the Liberation of the Island of Mindanao). In spite of this, during the celebration of the graduation of the students from the parish school, we were invited to eat with a Moslem family. It was a very friendly and enjoyable evening. The presence of Christians in this area serves as sign of peace and an invitation to dialogue.

If the first Christians who settled here had lost their patience and will for perseverance to which Saint James invites us in today's reading, things would probably be very different.

The apostle calls us to be patient, not to be always in a hurry, and especially to wait happily for the arrival of Jesus in our hearts. His arrival will come in small ways, each one a witness to the presence of Jesus in our world even though others try to convince us otherwise.

To finish this reflection, I ask you to pray for all the simple people of Timanan and for all the "Timanans" of the earth, who are faced with difficulties and are not free to express their faith in Jesus. Pray that they do not become discouraged and that they will continue to be patient in this Lord whose coming we are going to celebrate in a short while.

*Br. Antonio A. Sánchez Lozano
Spain, Province of Compostela
Davao - Session 2*

The story of Jesus manifests the identity of the Church among the poor, cultures and religions of Asia

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Just as a story reveals personal identity, a story of faith in Jesus reveals also the identity of the narrator as a believer. A witness who tells his/her story of encountering Jesus cannot and should not hide his/her identity as a disciple of the Savior. But just as a web of relationships with people, culture, and societal currents form a personal story or identity, so is Christian storytelling in Asia to be done in relationship with others. The Christian identity and story in Asia is always with and not apart from those of other cultures and religions. The story of Jesus is to be told by Asian Christians who are with and among the poor, the diverse cultures and the various religions of Asia that partly determine their identities and stories as Asians.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord, hear our voices raised in prayer. Let the light of the coming of your Son free us from the darkness of sin. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 18

Tuesday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Zephaniah 3: 14-18

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

A few days ago, while I was traveling in the metro, I heard the loudspeakers of the station announce that the metro's Yellow Line was interrupted. All transportation had been temporarily suspended due to an accident that had occurred on the tracks ahead. I stopped a passenger trying to exit the station to ask what had happened. His reply, rough and unexpected, cut through me like a knife, "Another young person has thrown himself under the train." In my mind I knew it was suicide, but the look of surprise on my face must have let the passenger know I was a foreigner, and that perhaps I had not understood him the first time. Again he said in an off-hand way: "One more who has committed suicide."

When I returned home, I had to speak about it with the brothers in the community. They showed me a recent report from Canada, saying, "Yes, unfortunately it is true: Canada has one of the highest rates of suicide among young people." In the report I found this sad statistic: "Suicide is the second cause of death among the young from ten to twenty-four years of age. Each year, on average, 294 young people commit suicide and there are many more who try." The report contained a lot of statistics. You could easily compare a lot of graphs: age groups, groups at risk, influencing factors, prevention, intervention, etc. I was struck also by some of the concluding recommendations as well, in particular: "In many cases, suicides are less frequent among the members of the clergy than in other professions. It is important that all members of the clergy are trained in suicide intervention during their formation period so that can better help people who are suffering." A second recommendation called for courses in suicide prevention to be included in the first years of secondary school.

The Word of the Lord today comes to us clearly and serenely through the prophet Zephaniah: “Do not be afraid. I will take away your misfortune and the shame that weighs heavily on you.” Today God is calling us to be close to children and young people who live in despair, those who have no future and those who have no voice. God is asking us to be their bearers of hope announcing that God is amongst us as a powerful savior.

*Br. Miguel A. Sancha
Spain, Province of Ibérica
Davao - Session 1*

The story of Jesus manifests the identity of the Church among the poor, cultures and religions of Asia

From “Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus”

[Continued from the previous day’s reflection] This reality of Asia has prompted Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan to propose that *missio ad* (towards) *gentes* should be understood now according to the new paradigm of *missio inter* (among or with) *gentes*.¹⁴ But I hold that *missio ad gentes* should not be eliminated but should rather be done *inter gentes*. There can never be a genuine mission towards people without it being at the same time mission with people. And genuine mission with people encourages mission towards people. With and among the poor, cultures and religions, Asian Christians are Christian. To and for the poor, cultures and religions, Asian Christians are Christian. The blending of these stories, I believe, can enrich the numerous reflections on mission as dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions of Asia.¹⁵

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father of love, you made a new creation through Jesus Christ your Son. May his coming free us from sin and renew his life within us, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer of the Day

¹⁴ Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan, *Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the FABC*, FABC Papers No. 109.

¹⁵ The fundamental document is FABC I (1974), “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia”, especially # 12, 14, 20, G. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, editors, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, Volume I (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pp. 11-25. Many plenary assemblies and institutes of the FABC are further elucidations of the basic insight of FABC I in changing circumstances.

December 19
Wednesday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Luke 1: 5-25

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

This passage from Luke reminds me of Bobbyshree. I met Bobbyshree in Bangalore while studying theology. Bobbyshree was a student in the big secondary school in which I used to volunteer to teach slum children for free. She was very faithful to helping me and the brothers when we came to help out at the school.

Bobbyshree came from a very poor family. The whole time she attended the school, she also was working to help her family. After she finished her studies at secondary school she began college studies. About half way through the first semester, Bobbyshree's father died. With two sisters, one older and one younger, and a brother still at home, Bobbyshree discontinued her studies to go to work full time so that she could help her family.

Some time later, Bobbyshree's older sister wanted to marry. To find money to help her sister, Bobbyshree sold her kidney. Unfortunately, after a few months the sister returned home because of dowry problems. Other events in the family have also presented new challenges. Bobbyshree's mother is getting older and has been sick. Bobbyshree's younger sister also wants to marry and her younger brother, who has turned out to be a bright student, wants to continue his studies. All of this will cost money...money the family does not have. One day I asked Bobbyshree, "What are you going to do? Where will you find the money?" Her answer caught me by surprise, "Brother, God is there. He will help me."

In today's reading we see Zechariah confronted with some unbelievable news. While Zechariah was doing his turn of priestly service offering incense before the Lord in the sanctuary, the Angel Gabriel appears to tell him that he and his wife of many years will have a child who will become a great prophet. "How will I know that this so? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years?"

Zechariah doubts the angel's words and because of it is struck speechless. Yet how could Zechariah doubt? Was he not a priest of the Lord, learned in the ways of the Lord? Had he forgotten that his ancestors Abraham and Sarah had a son in their old age (Genesis 8:12)? Had he forgotten that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, had a child through the intervention of God, the Almighty (1 Sam 5)? Still Zechariah asks, "How do I know this? I am an old man."

For me, these stories of faith bring a particular challenge. I am here in Davao, called to be a missionary in Asia through this Mission Ad Gentes Program. I am worried about many things. Where will I be? What is going to be my work? What language will I have to learn? What will be my food? I am convinced God has called me to be religious, yet I am more like Zachariah and less like Bobbyshree. I am not ready to take comfort in the words, "Nothing is impossible for God." So today my prayer will be, "Holy Mary, give me strength, courage and faith." Lord, "Let it be with me according to your will."

*Br. Maria Antoney Jeyaraj
India, Province of Sri Lanka and Pakistan
Davao - Session 2*

The Church keeps the memory of Jesus dynamically alive

Among and for other Asians, the Church tells the story of Jesus in the mode of keeping the memory of Jesus alive. Keeping the memory of Jesus does not mean locking it up in some untouchable realm of existence. It is kept when re-appropriated and shared. Trusting in the Holy Spirit and faithful to the memory guaranteed in the Tradition of the Universal Church, the Church in Asia should have the courage to rediscover new ways of telling the story of Jesus, retrieving its vitality and freeing its potentials for the renewal of the Asian realities. The story of Jesus, when guarded as a museum piece, fails to be life giving. In Ecclesia in Asia (EAs 19-20, 22) Pope John Paul II poses the challenge of finding the pedagogy that would make the story of Jesus closer to Asian sensibilities, especially to theologians. He is confident that the same story could be told in new perspectives and in the light of new circumstances.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father, may the coming celebration of the birth of your Son bring us your saving help and prepare us for eternal life. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 20
Thursday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

*Today's Scripture
Reading*

Luke 1: 26-38

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

My reflection on today's Gospel follows the Cardijn model for apostolic work and spirituality, called Situation-Reflection-Action. Marcellin himself saw the situation around him, reflected on it in the light of the Gospels, and then acted decisively.

For various reasons, among them the needs of the Church in Asia as outlined in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, our Institute has begun a process that will lead to the reassignment of a significant number of brothers into Asia over the next four years. Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's population. Two percent of the population is Catholic and half of these live in the Philippines and East Timor.

Today's gospel provides a powerful passage for reflection on this decision to move into Asia in greater numbers. Like those of us in the Ad Gentes program, Mary's life was moving along nicely until God intervened: "Listen; you are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus." God was asking a great thing of Mary. Her life's direction was about to change. It is the same for us who have been called to discern a possible assignment in Asia.

The Angel Gabriel described this new child as "Son of the Most High", who will occupy the "throne of his ancestor David", and "his reign will have no end". At the outset, all very appealing...to bear a son of such promise... Yet Mary's response is practical and realistic: She found the words of the angel troubling and asked, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" You can't be more down to earth and practical than that! Her response wasn't, "Yes, of course I will do whatever you say;" but instead, sensible and balanced, not pietistic and simplistic.

For us in the first Ad Gentes group preparing in Davao, the response has been similar: “sounds great, but...”. We have spent much time coming to a better understanding of ourselves, the situation in Asia, and a more current and realistic understanding of evangelization and mission. We have confronted the realities of health, our past experience in mission, and have reflected on our own personal suitability for this work.

The action responses have varied. There was certainly a lot of prayer, discussion, reflection and discernment. As we come to the end of this period of orientation and discernment, many will be moving to different parts of Asia, others to places in the Institute where there is a need for revitalization, and still others will be called home to do other works. The Lord’s will be done, wherever.

What is God asking of us today? And what is our action response? “Let what you have said be done to me.”

*Br. Paul Hough
Australia, Province of Sydney
Davao - Session 1*

The Story of Jesus provides meaning to the Church’s symbols of faith

We said that stories contain the meaning of the spirituality, ethics and convictions embraced by a person. It can happen that the Church can be so identified with some “standardized” or stereotyped symbols of doctrine, ethic and worship that the story that gives impetus to them is forgotten. Then the symbols themselves lose their power to touch people. The symbols of faith must be rooted back to the foundational story of Jesus. For example the breaking of bread at the Eucharist should be seen in many stories of sharing, caring and communion, without which the ritual is deprived of significance. A bishop’s ring should spring from a living story of service to the community, without which the ring is reduced to a piece of jewelry. A priest’s symbolism as Jesus’ presence should spring from a living story of availability to people, without which the priesthood becomes a status rather than a vocation. The symbols of faith must be traceable to the foundational story of Jesus. A return to the story of Jesus would also enable the Church in Asia to correct the impressions of foreign-ness attached to its doctrine, rituals and symbols (EAs 20). Detached from the originating story of Jesus, the symbols of the Church might tell of a story foreign to Jesus Himself.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Lord, our sins bring us unhappiness. Hear our prayer for courage and strength. May the coming of your Son bring us the joy of salvation. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From “Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus”

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 21

Friday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Luke 1: 46-56

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

It's not easy to be a missionary. It involves trust, self-denial and a readiness to confront new realities. In Mary, the simple woman from Nazareth, we find a formidable example of this in her wholehearted commitment to the plan of God. St. Luke, who knew Mary well and surely had long talks with her, tells us that *Mary made her decision and went without delay to a town in the mountains of Judah.* (Lk 1, 39)

Mary learns of the pregnancy of Elizabeth and without letting anything get in her way sets out to offer her loving care, because for her the most important thing is to serve one's neighbor. Impregnated by the Spirit of God, bearing God's Son in her womb, this woman cannot contain her joy and heads off to look after her cousin, attend to her needs, and bring her the Good News.

In her greeting to Elizabeth we realize that Mary doesn't have everything figured out. She simply trusts, believes, welcomes, and gives of herself. This is what's wondrous about the things of God: one doesn't have assurances, statistical analyses, feasibility studies, or graphs about cost-effectiveness; only faith and the affirmation of Elizabeth: *Blessed are you for believing that the Lord's promises would be fulfilled!* (Lk 1, 45)

Mary's song is a bursting forth of joy from one who is poor, who expects nothing more than God's favor *because the Mighty One has looked upon his humble handmaid and has done great things for me.* (Lk 1, 48-49)

In the eyes and heart of this woman who is poor we discover a call to social justice, not the kind that thirsts for vengeance and reclamation, but the divine justice of the Beatitudes: *He has dispersed the arrogant...overthrown the powerful...and lifted up the lowly. He filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed.* (Lk 1, 51-53)

Reflecting on this passage from the perspective of a missionary in Asia, I find in Mary the courage of one who trusts in God, who doesn't try to figure out what might happen in the future but believes.

Mary teaches us how to be aware of the needs of the poor who are all around us; to search for ways to help them, in a direct and personal way, bringing them the Good News of that Jesus who takes on flesh to show us the way to the Reign of God.

*Br. Francisco Javier Peña de la Maza
Mexico, Province of México Central
Davao - Session 2*

The Story of Jesus generates the Church

Stories also form a community, as we have already stated. In common experience and memory communities find cohesion and common value. The common memory of the story of Jesus generated by the Holy Spirit should be the fundamental source of unity and identity in faith of the Church in Asia. The Scriptures, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the doctrines, the rituals and the whole Tradition are ways of constantly telling the story of Jesus so as to keep His memory the core of the Christian community. But this sense of community is not an excuse to isolate the Church so that it could preserve its identity. The story of Jesus that makes it a Christian community is the same story that the whole community must share. In the paradigm of storytelling, the Church loses its identity if it fails to tell the story that is its very identity. "For whoever would preserve his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it," Jesus says (Mk 8:35-36). It has been the conviction that it is the whole Church that is called to mission.¹⁶ The local Churches need to discern and develop the many gifts inspired by the Holy Spirit so that they could contribute to the telling of Jesus' story. The whole Church, the fruit of the story of Jesus, becomes its narrator.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

All-powerful Father, guide us with your love as we await the coming of your Son. Keep us faithful that we may be helped through life and brought to salvation. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

¹⁶ See BIMA III (Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, 1982), #5, Ibid. p. 104.

December 22

Saturday, Third Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Luke 3: 1-6

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

The word of God was addressed to John... (*Put your name in his place*) because God also addresses his word to you. John, enveloped by the silence of the desert, responded to this call and set out. Perhaps it was easier than for us because his pathway travelled through deserts of silence, deserts of solitude and his heart kept vigil. We also live in the middle of a desert, but our desert is impregnated with noises that do not allow us to listen; probably we also live in a desert of solitude, but we have disguised it in such a way that we do not recognise ourselves in it. Thus, it is difficult to listen to the Word of God that would allow us to find once more interior silence, to go out of ourselves and, as John did, proclaim a baptism of conversion.

This time of Advent is a new occasion that the Lord is offering us to convert us, because purification is necessary, to clear the “noises” that do not allow us to listen, to identify the “disguises” that we carry. Stop yourself a moment; seek interior silence; distance yourself from everything that can distract you and start your purification. Be sincere with yourself, do not refuse the truth; entrust yourself in God.

When you have listened to the Word and taken on the commitment of responding to its call, you realise the quantity of useless things that you have accumulated throughout the years. If your response is sincere, it will not be difficult for you to renounce all that, because finally that has no value for the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a useless weight, and to walk in the desert of humanity you only need, like John, to set out and to pray.

Br. Ramon Serra i Cubí
Spain, Province of L'Hermitage
Davao - Session 2

A listening Church tells the Story of Jesus

Stories find their completion in the listener. But stories that are imposed are not listened to. The Church in Asia must trust in the vitality of the story it offers, without any thought of forcing it on others. It is already a beautiful story that will surely touch those who have even a bit of openness. Pope John Paul II tells us in *Ecclesia in Asia* that we share the gift of Jesus not to proselytize but out of obedience to the Lord and as an act of service to the peoples of Asia (EAs 20). Let the story speak and touch. Let the Holy Spirit open the hearts and memories of the listeners and invite them to transformation. The multitudes of poor peoples of Asia can find compassion and hope in Jesus' story. The cultures of Asia will resonate with the disturbing challenge to true freedom in Jesus' story. The various religions of Asia will marvel at the respect and appreciation towards those seeking God and genuine holiness in Jesus' story. The Church in Asia is called to humbly allow the Spirit to touch its listeners. As a storyteller of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Asia is to enter the worlds and languages of its listeners and from within them to tell Jesus' story just like at Pentecost.¹⁷ But that means the Church in Asia must be a good listener to the Spirit and to the poor, cultures and religions if it is to speak meaningfully at all. A storytelling Church must be a listening Church.¹⁸

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father, creator and redeemer of humankind, you decreed, and your Word became man, born of the Virgin Mary. May we come to share the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our human nature, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

¹⁷ Cf. BIRA IV/12, (Twelfth Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, 1991) # 42-47, *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹⁸ Cf. BIRA I (First Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, 1979), # 11-14, *Ibid.*, p. 111.

December 23

Sunday, Fourth Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Matthew 1: 18-24

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

Please note: the Scripture reading above is not the actual Advent reading for the day as stipulated in the Liturgical Calendar. The reading is, however, appropriate to the Advent season.

A Story from Davao

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, ‘God is with us’.”

While having my Marist exposure experience in Kalilangan, Philippines, I spent a night in one of the barrios (villages). Being a foreigner, I was so afraid. I looked forward to seeing the next day. Little did I realize the new day would be a blessing for me and for the people around me.

The children of the family and their parents did everything to make me feel at home. The initial fears I had left me and my eyes were opened. It was an honor to be among these people. I realized that I too have to share what I have freely received and that is Jesus, (comma here) the greatest gift to the people of all nations. These people blessed me with their poverty of spirit. The promise of Jesus is true...whenever we gather in his name; he will be there among us.

It is easy to conclude that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled with the birth of Jesus. The name *Emmanuel*, “God is with us”, speaks of the mission he has given His son. God has become present to his people in Jesus. No wonder we are asked to focus our eyes on him ‘Look,..’ (v.23). God has chosen to reveal himself in a unique way and the good man Joseph is a true witness of Jesus’ virgin birth (v.20). This God-child grew up in wisdom (Lk 2: 52). How blessed was Joseph to participate in God’s fatherhood.

Today the Church is on a mission, the mission given to it by Jesus himself: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” We are asked to go and tell the story of Jesus because we believe in him and must bear witness to this faith. This is what we must share. (Mt. 28:19). St. Marcellin Champagnat, our Founder, says in a letter to a friend of his, “We belong to all the dioceses of the world.” (Fr. Douillet, October, 1836). It is from here that the Congregation finds energy to go out too. So, let us go! Remember, he is with us always, to the end of the age. (Mt. 28:20)

*Br. Andrew John Sikelu
South Korea, District of Korea
Davao - Session 2*

The Church tells the Story of Jesus in a multiplicity of ways

Stories can be told in a variety of ways. So can the story of Jesus. The Church in Asia, with its rich heritage of storytelling acquired from Asian homes, neighborhoods, religions and traditional wisdoms, can be creative in telling the story of Jesus. The witness of a holy, ethical and upright life is still the best story about Jesus in Asia.¹⁹ The lives of holy men and women and martyrs show how the story of Jesus is inscribed in persons and communities.²⁰ Men and women who have dedicated themselves to service of neighbor, like Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, are living stories that Asian peoples love to hear. Defense of the poor, work for justice, promotion of life, caring for the sick, educating children and the youth, peacemaking, alleviation of foreign debt and stewardship of creation are some ways of retelling Jesus’ story in Asia today.²¹ But the Church must also be ready to accept the Holy Spirit’s surprising ways of retelling the story of Jesus.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Father, all powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Son who prepares us for his coming. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

¹⁹ Cf. BIMA III (Third Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate, 1982) # 10, Ibid., p. 105.

²⁰ Cf. Francisco, p. 167.

²¹ Cf. EAs # 33-41

December 24

Monday, Fourth Week of Advent

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

Luke 1: 67-79

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

"And you my child, shall be called the prophet of the most high; for you shall go before the Lord to prepare straight paths for him"

I accompanied a Marist Missionary Sister, as she was visiting a long-serving catechist who was reported to be very ill. We traveled steadily uphill along dusty and corrugated roads, to where she lived high in the hills of central Mindanao, about twenty kilometers out of town.

We found Rose desperately ill, legs paralyzed, lying on her bare-boarded bed in her rough, simple dwelling with rosary and bible beside her. Her daughter, aged 13 years had left school to care for her. Even through her obvious pain and discomfort she graciously thanked us for coming, saddened because she couldn't offer us her hospitality. There was no hint of bitterness or anger at the bleakness of her situation. On the contrary, I wondered at her peace and serene acceptance. We offered any assistance that we could, but in the end, praying with her was the only thing we could do.

Today's reading features the *Benedictus*, that great statement of Zechariah, so full of praise and promise, that echoes throughout the whole history of God's relationship with his people. It is a hope-filled declaration giving light and peace, promising *life without fear, all the days of our lives as we live in holiness and righteousness.*

Rose undoubtedly prays this prayer as we do, regularly. I was troubled in trying to reconcile this wonderful statement of hope in *'the tender mercy of our God breaking upon us'* in the face of the hopeless situation of Rose, and of the millions of those around the world like her. Is it just a vain hope; a delusion?

I felt, when leaving Rose that day, quite powerless and disturbed. Nonetheless, the encounter uplifted and enlightened us. Then suddenly I realized I had it upside down: we were the ones being evangelized. Rose was the *'prophet of the Most High'* and it was she and not us who was leading *'into the ways of peace.'*

*Br. Geoff Kelly
Australia, Province of Sydney
Davao - Session 2*

The Church is the voice of suppressed stories

It is a scandal that suppression of stories is a daily occurrence in many parts of Asia. The poor, the girl-child, women, refugees, migrants, the minorities, the indigenous peoples, the victims of different types of domestic, political, ethnic violence and the environment are but a few of those whose stories are suppressed. Many are afraid of the stories they will tell. Or are they afraid to hear the truth and its demands? The Church tells the story of Jesus whose words often fell on deaf ears and who was executed so that he could be prevented from telling His story. So in Asia the Church pays tribute to Him by allowing itself to be the storyteller of the voiceless so that Jesus' voice may be heard in their suppressed stories.

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay; give new courage to your people who trust in your love. By your coming, raise us to the joy of your kingdom, where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

From "Mission in Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus"

Closing Prayer of the Day

December 25

Christmas

Call to Prayer

God, come to my assistance;
-- *Lord, make haste to help me.*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
-- *As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.*

Today's Scripture Reading

John 1: 1-5; 9-14

Please use the scripture translation you are most comfortable using when praying.

A Story from Davao

We do not always realise the luck that we have in being born and living after our God was made flesh by taking our human nature. Since his appearance on earth, the human being has questioned himself on the meaning of his existence and of his destiny. Each person intensely seeks to quench his thirst for happiness and fullness, to satisfy his profound desire to live intensely.

Where can a response be found to such a question, to this constant search that inhabits each one of us in his existential quest?

Many "Masters" have made their fortune by proposing to those who want to listen to them responses to this insatiable desire to live fully. It was precisely to respond to this question that "The Word was made flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1, 14), in the person of Jesus.

Jesus came to shed light on our condition as human beings by revealing to us who God is and who we truly are, through his life, death and resurrection. "Light shines in the darkness" (Jn 1, 5).

Thus, what is his response? What truth has he passed on to us?

He tells us that God is Father, Son and Spirit and we are his beloved sons and daughters, called to live in a constant relationship of intimacy with Him.

Jesus, Son made flesh, was faithful to this truth until death and the Father confirmed Him in this truth by raising Him from the dead.

Resurrected, the Son sent us the Spirit: "After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20, 22).

This Spirit, present in each human being, is light, energy and love, and he calls us to complete communion with Him in prayer and service to others, especially the poorest with whom Jesus identified himself.

The good news is that this source of energy is accessible to all those who desire it, as Thomas Merton said so well: “The fact is, however, that if you descend into the depths of your own spirit...and arrive somewhere near the centre of what you are, you are confronted with the inescapable truth, at the very root of your existence, that you are in constant and immediate and inescapable contact with the infinite power of God.”¹

I hope that you discover all the grandeur and richness of your being during this Christmas 2007.

*Br. Richard Roy
Canada, Province of Canada
Davao - Session 2*

Mission as telling of the story of Jesus is already taking place in Asia. We celebrate the many storytellers of the Holy Spirit whose stories, though hidden, have generated new stories in the lives of many Asian brothers and sisters.

*From “Mission in
Asia: Telling the
Story of Jesus”*

I close by turning to Jesus, the Logos or Story of God and master storyteller of the Reign of God. Let us behold Him. Let us listen to Him. Let us learn from Him. Let us open ourselves to His story and His storytelling. His story is about the Abba He has experienced and the fullness of life Abba offers. His life and identity were rooted in this constant union with Abba. Yet he lived like an ordinary Jew, an ordinary Asian, with family, friends, women, children, foreigners, temple officials, the teachers of the law, the poor, the sick, the friendless, the sinners and enemies. They were all part of who He was. He gathered a community, a new family of those who would listen to God’s word and act on it. He told them stories of Abba and life in Abba. He used their language. His parables were simple yet disarming. He told them about Abba through his meals, healing, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and critique of false religiosity. His story leads him to a supper where he was food and where he washed the feet of his friends. Nothing could stop him from telling his story, even on the cross. His humiliating death should have been the end of His story. But Abba had something more to say, “My Son - He is truly risen.” Pouring his gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, Jesus entrusts His story to us. I hear Him saying, “Listen to my story. Go and tell my story again and again where it all began - in my home, in my beloved Asia!”

*Most Rev. Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Bishop of Imus, Philippines
Address to the Asia Mission Conference
19 October 2006*

God of love, Father of all, the darkness that covered the earth has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made flesh. Make us a people of this light. Make us faithful to your Word, that we may bring your life to the waiting world. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Closing Prayer of
the Day*

MISSION AD GENTES

Phase 1: Selection of Candidates

A letter of invitation from the Superior General was mailed to each member of the Institute explaining the project and inviting each member to consider participating in the project. Positive responses are processed by the Vicar General and the Delegate of the Superior General. Discernment begins immediately and is ongoing throughout the entire formation process explained below.

Phase 2: Initial Formation/Orientation: Davao, Philippines

Once a candidate has been accepted in the Mission “Ad Gentes” Project he will participate in a five month-long formation and orientation program in Davao, Philippines

Phase 3: Selection of Missionary Countries

As groups are being prepared for their missions, the Delegate of the Superior General, with the assistance of some of the brothers already involved in Asia, will visit dioceses to talk with local Church leaders to assess the possibility of new apostolic ventures.

Phase 4: Insertion/Language and Culture Formation Period

Following the five-month initial formation program in Davao, the brothers, in teams (communities) of three or four will be assigned to a location (diocese) worked out in advance with the local bishop and those responsible for the “Ad Gentes” project. This Insertion Phase could last up to one year given the needs and challenges each community will face in their new location. During this insertion phase the primary focus for each brother in these newly established communities will focus on learning the language and the culture of the people.

Phase 5: Launching of Apostolic Works

While the primary focus of the Insertion Phase will be language and cultural studies, at an appropriate time, each community will begin to investigate possible options for ministry. In dialogue with local church leaders and with direction from the project managers, new Marist apostolic projects will be launched, ideally, one per community.

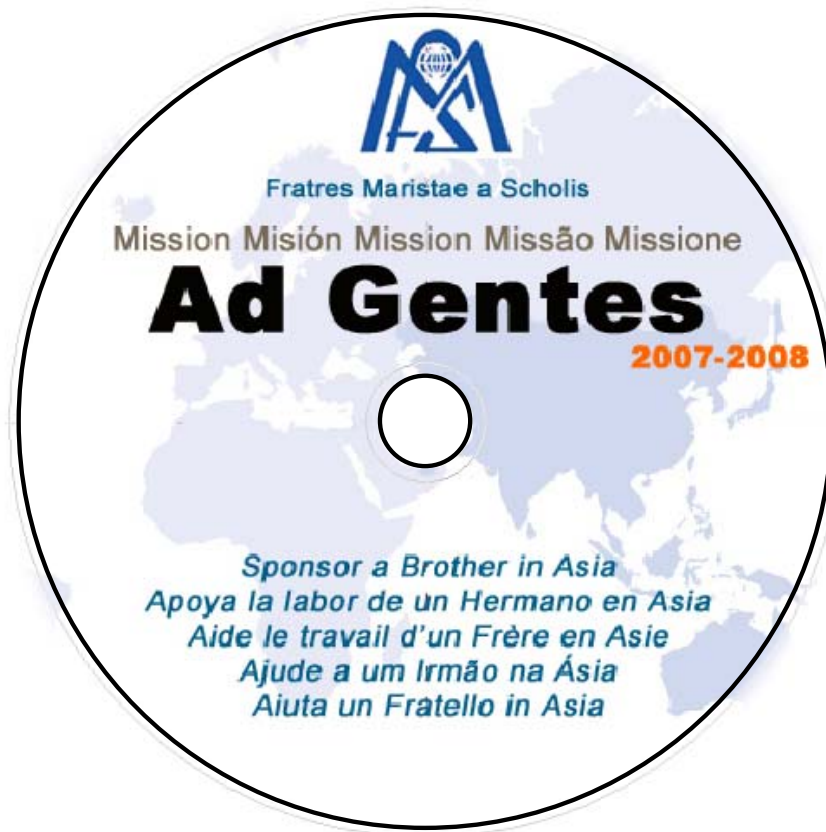
Phase 6: Ongoing Supervision

For the first few years after its establishment, the community will be under the supervision and responsibility of the General Administration. Eventually, these new communities and ministries will fall under the jurisdiction of one of the juridical administrative units of the Institute.

MARIST MISSION AD GENTES IN ASIA

Join our "Sponsor a Brother in Asia" Campaign

*Ask your Provincial for a copy of the
Mission Ad Gentes CD
to know more about the campaign*



*Help support the Brothers in Asia
with
Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving*



Institute of the Marist Brothers

Bureau of International Solidarity

Piazzale M. Champagnat, 2
C.P. 10250
00144 Roma
ITALIA
Phone: (39) 06 54 51 71
E-mail: solidar@fms.it
Site: www.champagnat.org

Printing

Marist Brothers, Rome
August 2007