

“Jesus is there on the cross to be with those who are guilty: through this closeness, he offers them salvation. Thus the good thief becomes a witness of Grace.”

Pope Francis

*“Remember, you are dust...”
Ash Wednesday in the
Central African Republic.*



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Dear Friends,

In his Gospel account of Our Lord's Passion, Saint Luke describes the two criminals who were crucified to the right and the left of Jesus. One of them upbraids and derides the Lord, but the other rebukes him, saying “Have you no fear of God...? In our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then, a little later, this second criminal turns to Jesus and says: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Cf Lk 23:39-43).

The words the man speaks are few, but moving and pregnant with meaning. Clearly, some kind of light has illuminated his soul, for he understands who the Crucified One is. Where has this sudden enlightenment come from? Perhaps he was once a good man, or at least performed some good deed or other in his life. Perhaps this was what saved him. God never forgets. He desires that we all may come to heaven. So this tenderness and kindness on the part of our Heavenly Father should encourage us to strive more and more to perform good works of mercy.



“The tenderness and kindness on the part of our Heavenly Father should encourage us to strive... to perform good works of mercy”

There is no other way of explaining the very different responses of these two thieves. The light of grace that converted one of them to faith also unlocked in him the well-spring of love, allowing repentance and sympathy to flow. This enlightenment of the heart prompts him to say, “Jesus,

remember me when you come into your kingdom!” It is astonishing to see the wonderful change that must have come about as deep emotions penetrated the soul of this repentant criminal. Particularly the fact that he can ask for the fruits of redemption even before Jesus's redeeming sacrifice had been completed.

“Today you will be with me in Paradise”. How majestic is Jesus's reply – it re-echoes right down to our own days. Jesus could have freed his hands and feet from the wood of the cross, yet he remained there. His image will for ever be that of the Crucified One. And as the Crucified, he speaks the most solemn and noble words of grace and

mercy. Before the eyes of the leading men of the people, who mock him, he grants mercy to the thief and promises him eternal life. What a noble and kingly act! It compels us to fall on our knees also.

While we should contemplate the Passion of Jesus throughout the year, it is only right that during Lent we should contemplate the wounds, the nails, the blood, the crown of thorns and the lance with renewed devotion. But at the same time we should

also reflect on the royal dignity of our crucified Lord. His human nature was filled with divine wisdom; he knew all things and saw right into men's hearts. Let us bow down before this majesty, since ultimately we too need his forgiveness and mercy if we are to enter his Kingdom. Let us then open our hearts to the gift of his Divine Love, so that we can then pass this gift on to others!

Monsignor Aurelio Gazzera

President of ACN



“God is the one who is guiding us”

“God does not leave us in the darkness. It is only when we abandon Him that we go astray.” These wise words of Saint Teresa of Avila – Doctor of the Church – are the inspiration for the life of the Carmelite Sisters in Venezuela.

Deilys Maria is 27 and has been in the convent for five years. In the midst of the chaotic situation in the country she confesses, “I have come to see how much God loves us, and I trust in Him. His love is

evident in the things of everyday, if we only open the eyes of our hearts.” Together with the other 15 religious Sisters in Caracas, she is being supported in her life and ministry by ACN, as are the 10 religious Sisters in



Living in the love of God – for “unhappy is the one who does not know what it means to love” (Saint Teresa of Avila).



“From silly devotions and sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!” (attributed to St Teresa): in Venezuela you won’t find either.



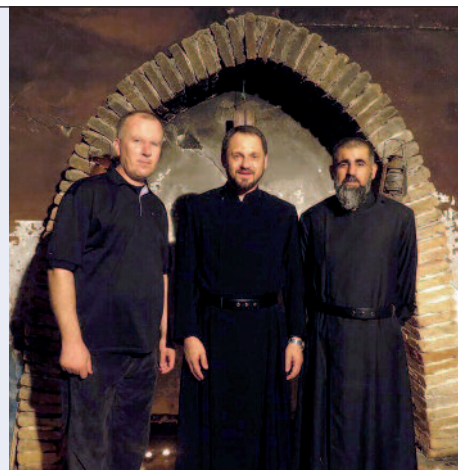
Merida and the five in Maracaibo. We have supported them with **£7,200**. For these Sisters, ACN is itself a sign of God’s divine Providence. “God is the one who is sustaining our lives and guiding us through this crisis. We can only follow, with grateful hearts.” They pray daily – for us as well – and they sew and embroider Mass vestments and scapulars, along with other handicrafts, and they also run a small bookshop. Needless to say, this work does not suffice to cover even their frugal expenses. Medicine and water are a heavy financial burden on the Sisters. They also live by another wise saying of the great saint and reformer, Saint Teresa: “We can never know for sure that we love God, even if there are many important indications that we do. But we can know if we love our neighbour. And the more we advance in this love, the greater likewise will be our love for God.” ●

For the Brothers of Jesus in Nineveh

The Brothers of Jesus the Redeemer are the world’s only Syriac Catholic congregation.

But their new monastery will be a sign of the Church’s new beginning in Iraq. Their old building situated in Qaraqosh – the largest Christian city in the country – was looted and burnt down in 2015 by terrorists from the so-called Islamic State. A new monastery complex a little way outside the city, comprising an existing chapel and six simple huts, now needs to be made weather-

proof. The huts will accommodate the congregation’s three brothers and between 10 and 15 guests who choose to come here for retreats and prayer gatherings. Together with their archbishop, the brothers are hoping to root the Christian faith ever more deeply in the soil of the Nineveh Plains. The spiritual formation of the laity and shared prayer are central to the charism of the congregation, which was established in 2001. And already, the new monastery is becoming a sign of redemption, new hope



Raed, Yasir and Wissam (l. to r.), the three brothers of the congregation.

and a return of Christian life to the region. ACN has promised **£19,200** towards the cost of work on the walls and roof, for the Brothers of Jesus, in the Nineveh Plains. ●



Trusting in Mary

They depend entirely on donations, faithful to the words of Christ “Freely you have received, freely give” (Mt 10:8).

Jesus spoke these words when he sent his disciples out to heal the sick and cast out demons. A major aspect of the vocation of the Dominican Nurses of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the care of the sick and dying in the countryside. For 36 years they worked in the region of Thiès in western Senegal. Then in 1992 they were recalled to their mother house in France. But they kept up their close links with the people of

the region, who waited patiently for their return and even made a plot of land available for them.

A quarter of a century later, the Sisters came back, initially for a few weeks, then for a few months, and now they are planning to build a new convent, close to the Saint Dominic’s dispensary and healthcare centre on the land given them in the parish of Saint Peter. Here they will also follow

the other aspects of their charism, namely prayer, communal life and evangelisation. The hope is that children and young people in particular will be able to spend time here in peace and in quiet retreat. One wing of the convent will be reserved for the Sisters, while another will be for volunteer workers at the clinic. It is a difficult venture, and they need our help. They are asking for **£25,600** and entrusting everything to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who has never yet failed them. ●



“Heal the sick” (Mt 10:8): Saint Dominic’s dispensary and healthcare centre.



Great is their joy! The sisters are back and intend to stay.



“For they shall be called children of God” (Mt 5:9): Outing with the youth group.

India

A matter of the heart

“Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32).

The hearts of the 300 Brothers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus still burn within them today. They want to put into practice the words of Jesus – the message of the Gospel. All the brothers were born in India. In 2019 they commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of Brother Angelo, one of their two founders. To mark the occasion they have established a programme of ongoing renewal, whereby each of the 115 brothers in the province of Angelo (one of their two

provinces) will spend two days deepening his knowledge of the spiritual legacy of their founder – humility, passion for the mission, uncompromising support for the poor on the margins of society. The Provincial Superior Brother Antony Raj explains that his programme will help the poor with whom their founder Brother Angelo worked throughout his life. Indeed the charism of the congregation is directed towards them, as they aim to bring “Good News to the poor, in the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. In their work, evangelism, education and social work go hand in hand.

This unconditional love of Christ has led to



Love seeking understanding: studying in the service of the poor.

them setting up special schools for the blind and those with mental or physical handicaps, who are often not cared for in India. The brothers have asked for our financial support for this programme (**£2,600**). It is not much, but your generosity and solidarity will undoubtedly make their hearts burn with love. ●



*Mission territory:
Catholics in Kyrgyzstan
total barely 4,000 souls.*

“All for God, and all for us”

“Small but lively” – that’s how the apostolic administrator of the Catholic Church in Kyrgyzstan, Father Anthony Corcoran SJ, describes the Catholic community in this Central Asian republic, adding “The Sisters are its real treasure”. In the letter below he describes this treasure and asks our support (£2,600) for their life and apostolate:

“When we think of the missions, we imagine distant lands, high mountains, dense jungle, rugged roads. But the true mission territory lies in hearts and souls. Discovering these contours demands a special kind of pioneering spirit. The Sisters have this spirit. Their intuition for the cares, concerns and feelings of each single person is what distinguishes their special role in our mission.

One of the *babushkas*, the little old grandmas, whom I got to know in Siberia, where I used to work during the time of the Soviet Union, once described the intimate bond between the Sisters and the people of the community they served, in these short words: ‘All for God, and all for us’. As a missionary priest who by the grace of God has been permitted to spend many years

working alongside such women, I can only confirm what she said. At present we have six Franciscan Sisters who specialise in education working here in Kyrgyzstan and, even though there are no Catholic schools as yet, the charism and the spirit of Saint Francis are tangible in their tireless efforts to inspire people – believers and seekers alike – with love for God. In their joy, their prayer and their total commitment they are true witnesses to the special love of God for the little and the poor.

For me as a missionary it has always been a great joy, and indeed a great consolation, to see how close the loving bond is between the Sisters and the ordinary people. It is a particular kind of relationship or, as my *babushka* would have said, a ‘reciprocal



The mission starts small: Mass in a house chapel.

belonging to one another’. This mutual bond opens hearts, and this profound trust also generates a certain moral authority. And this unique dynamic in their relationship is particularly evident in the vocation of the Sisters within the Church.

A bishop from a neighbouring missionary diocese often used to comment that you can tell the difference when the Sisters are there, for the faith life of the community is deeper and more active. And whenever our priests talk together about the importance of the work of the Sisters in their parishes, they always come to the same conclusion: without the loving care, without the willing assistance and the prayer-borne accompaniment, without the visible witness for Christ, the harvest of the mission would be markedly poorer, not to say sparse. One priest remarked: ‘The Sisters prepare the hearts of the children and the faithful for the encounter with Jesus. Then, when the Lord comes, in the sacraments, in the Word and in the community, he finds these open, pure hearts waiting. What could be a greater blessing for the mission?’

The example of the Sisters inspires courage, including in me. I am infinitely grateful to God for them.” *Bishop Anthony Corcoran* ●



So much starts with the Sisters: youth work in a summer camp.

Bringing them all to heaven

They are on the frontline in a twofold sense: the frontline in the war and the frontline in their work of mercy. The Brothers of Saint Albert, in East Ukraine, care for the homeless, the handicapped and the alcoholics.

Yurij is 69. His story is a story of mercy received. He suffered divorce, breakdown and alcoholism – which eventually affected his legs. In the hospital they amputated his right leg and left foot. As soon as the wounds had healed, he was discharged. It was winter; he had no home and no money – not even for crutches. He left the hospital crawling on his knees, dragged himself to a park bench and wept. A man and his daughter spotted him and took him to the Albertine Brothers. They took him in, found him a wheelchair and a bed. For him they became “my brothers”. Now he works in the house and in his free time looks after the vegetables in the garden. The brothers have given “meaning and colour to my life”, he says. Now Yurij has hope again.

Igor too was sitting, homeless and sick, on a bench. A woman, a stranger, took him to

the monastery of the Albertines. “They gave me a bed, which I had missed so much, warm food, clothing.” Igor was already so weakened by then that when he first arrived he had to be artificially fed. Today he does the cooking for everyone. Brother Wiesław, who on first seeing him thought he would live “just two weeks more”, now says, “He puts his whole heart into this work. The meals for all of us are delicious.”

The Albertines offer hope and food. They run shelters for the homeless, a soup kitchen for the poor, and a bakery. “No one gets to heaven alone”, their founder, Adam Chmielowski used to say. A young artist, he had initially joined the Franciscans as Brother Albert, giving overnight shelter to the needy in his own studio; then, on the advice of his confessor, he went to the homeless shelters in order to be closer to the suffering and destitute. He himself knew poverty and suffering. Aged 18, in the war against the Russians, he had lost a leg, while for the last two years of his life he suffered from stomach cancer. The four Albertines in the diocese of Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhya are the last hope for many people. This could also be said of the 45 Sisters in the nine female



An all-embracing love:
Adam Chmielowski (1845 – 1916),
founder of the Albertine Brothers,
was canonised in 1989.

congregations in the same diocese. They too are beacons of hope for so many people in the war zone – from the lonely, elderly and sick, through to the children preparing for First Holy Communion.

Thanks to your generosity, we are able to help both the Albertine Brothers and the religious Sisters in the diocese with basic support (£20,900), so that their light can continue to witness to the love of Christ. For all they want is to bring everybody with them into heaven. ●



A life with meaning and dignity once more: no one is turned away by the Albertine Brothers.



Mischa was a street child. Now he helps in the monastery bakery.



Bread for the poor in the soup kitchen: Brother Wiesław at work.



For the love of Christ

Pakistan is a tough place to live for Christians – and especially for women. Any woman who agrees to live and work there for a lifetime as a religious Sister has to love the land and its people – and of course Christ – very much indeed. Hence we were more than happy to help repair and renovate the old convent in Lahore for the elderly and retired Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary (SCJM). It is only right that they should have a secure and tranquil evening of their lives in this country, to which they have totally devoted themselves. And it is thanks to your generosity that we were able to help. Sister Sophia Patras “can’t find the words” to thank you. “God alone can reward you”. And if only she could, she would love to share with you the birthday cake they baked for Sister Maria.



Thomas Heine-Geldern,
Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

As Catholics of the Latin Rite – and unlike many of the Eastern Catholic Churches – we now have no more than two penitential seasons and only two days of strict fasting in all the year!

It is a shame, actually, that the sense of self-denial, of going without something in order to prepare for a major feast, or even for an important decision, has largely been lost among us. In the past, in many families, renouncing certain foods and drinks, or indeed other comforts, during the Lenten fast – and also in Advent – was a unifying way of preparing for the Church’s major feast days. Generally speaking, our fasting leads on to discussions about its meaning and relevance. Is there any better way of explaining to our own children why it can be such a meaningful thing to fast for a particular purpose?

And not only this. Such voluntary renunciation not only prepares us spiritually for Easter, but also teaches us the spirit of sharing.

Your willingness to do just this, and your subsequent generosity which makes it possible for us to help our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ, is proof positive that you knew this already, even before I ever wrote about it.

Thank you for this!

Need, love and thanks – your letters

A ‘Gift of Faith’ to choose

Just letting you know that your ‘Gifts of Faith’ project has presented me with the opportunity of proposing to each of my 10 grandchildren that they choose from the ‘Gifts’ a project to which we can contribute (the ‘we’ being me of course). All thought it a great idea, as do I, as it drew their attention to brothers and sisters and families in dire need that we can help (and planting a seed in them)! May God continue to bless you all.

A grandfather in Australia

Treasure in heaven

I have 3 children – 5yrs old, 3yrs old, 2yrs old. I have to spend a lot of time and money taking care of them. My top priority is always caring for them, not other people. It made me somewhat stingy about money and also pay less attention to religious life. But, one day, I realised that I’ve never stored up treasures in heaven. I’ve been very busy working hard, raising kids, but I

did nothing to have the “eternal life” which is the most important thing. No sooner had I thought it than I donated to ACN which first came to my mind. Thank you ACN for giving me a chance to express love towards God and our neighbors. And I extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone working in all parts of the world for the Church in need.

A mother in South Korea

Conjuring up a smile

I thank God that, together with you, I am able to do something to help our brothers and sisters who, like Christ, are being tortured and giving their lives. May God bless and protect you all, so that you can continue to help those who are suffering most in the world, these people of great faith who deserve to be honoured and not forgotten. I hope my donation will help to conjure up a smile on the beautiful faces of the children in Aleppo, who so greatly deserve our help. United with you in prayer.

A benefactor in Portugal

Where to send your contribution for the Church in Need

Our address: Aid to the Church in Need, 12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA. Please use the Freepost envelope – it saves you money and helps us. If you give by standing order or direct debit or have sent a donation recently, please accept our sincere thanks. This Mirror is for your interest and information.

Mirror Editors: Jürgen Liminski & John Newton | Publisher: Aid to the Church in Need
Printed in the UK by Cliffe Enterprise, Eastbourne BN22 8UY
ISSN 0252-2535 *De licentia competentis auctoritatis ecclesiasticae*



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Church in Need

ACN UNITED KINGDOM

12–14 Benhill Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4DA
Tel. 020 8642 8668 | A registered charity in
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