



INDIAN PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

Dear Brothers and Friends of Edmund,

Belated Easter greetings to all our readers.

I am at present in Mumbai after attending my niece's wedding. I was fortunate to be here during Easter week and attend the services at the Jesuit St. Peter's Parish. They had three very fine Jesuit homilists in Fr. Errol Fernandes, Fr. Charles Rodrigues and Fr. Andrew. What a difference a good homily can make to a liturgical service!

During the month of March, the Indian Province celebrated two important Feast Days, the Feast of St. Patrick's on the 17th and St. Joseph on the 19th. What is the significance of these two days for us as a Province?

Br. Michael Burke in the Congregation Website has this to say about the feast about the 17th of March, "St Patrick's Day prompts us each year to remember with gratitude all the richness that has blessed Edmund Rice's community worldwide through his Irish context and culture. The strong missionary tradition of the Irish Church, represented in Edmund Rice's Brothers and countless other religious Congregations, as well as groups like St Patrick's Missionary Society, is a reminder of the missionary dimension of the Christian vocation. St Patrick's Day is a national holiday for the Irish to celebrate their heritage, and a day for the rest of us to pray for the people of Ireland and specially for the ER Network there."

On the 17th, we also remember to pray for the Patrician Brothers, another congregation with Irish roots and a number of schools in India. The Patrician Brothers call their spirituality breast plate spirituality and one of their general chapter documents elucidates this spirituality as follows, "At the heart of our identity and mission is Patrician spirituality shaped and inspired by the Breastplate. The short extract from the full Breastplate ---Christ be with me, etc., is said daily in Patrician Communities and schools. Saying this part of the Breastplate is the easy bit. The challenge is to 'live it'...to be conscious of Christ's presence all around us at all times, and especially in those with whom we live and work. This is a powerful invitation to honour the sacredness of creation and to have a profound respect for the dignity of all people. High ideals indeed, but very much in alignment with the spirit of the Gospel, and a worthy platform for Patrician spirituality."

The 19th of March- the feast of St. Joseph is also the feast day of the Province. Especially important this year as the Province celebrates 125 years of its existence. St.



Joseph is the Patron of many of our Novitiates in the different provinces and so we pray specially for our Novices on this day.

Our Province has three schools named after St. Joseph in Calcutta, Naini Tal and Bajpe and one school named after St. Patrick-in Asansol. The Indian Province had a school in Allahabad named after St. Joseph but that was handed back to the diocese.

Yours fraternally

Mark

A BIRTHDAY THAT WAS DIFFERENT

For the first time in the Indian Province have we had with us three nonagenarians – Bosco Oman, Peter Gomez and Borromeo Walsh who celebrated his ninetieth on March the 2nd. Brs. Xavier Leonard, DeBritto Curran, Johnny Walsh and Joe Donovan, now in Ireland, take the total to seven. Borro, the ‘baby’ of the group, celebrated his Birthday in Goethals in a very quiet manner as can be expected with just the GMS community, Raj from Asansol, Jim and Martin from Dum Dum and the local Parish Priest. The highlight of the evening was of course a short speech by Borro expressing his gratitude to each person present and then the recitation of one of his poems appropriately titled “Birthdays” – delivered without recourse to any notes and with perfect diction, accent, inflection, intonation. A joy to listen to:

Birthdays

Job cursed the day that he was born;
The prototype despairing man
With nothing more than bitter scorn
For honoring nativities.

Accustomed to the flattering word,
The satisfied, successful man
Basks in the tributes round him heard
Loud on his day of origin.

His children’s birthdays are savoured
Red-letter days of merriment,
Shared with others fortune-favoured,
Shared the blessings, shared content.

No party for the hungry child
To want and misery inured
None on its birthday ever smiled
Nor soothed with emollient word.

The hungry child is born to pain
Its parents born to wretchedness,



THE MYSTERY WE CALL GOD IS THE
GRACE OF OUR EXISTENCE

KARL RAHNER





Born to rejection and disdain,
Their span a barren wilderness.

Some things in life can lacerate
The heart with scars one can't efface
Birthdays are for the fortunate;
Job had a reasonable case.

God bless you Borro and may we have you with us for many years to come.

Martin Fernandes

Musings

To mark *The Year of Consecrated Life*, all the religious of the deanery were invited to Regina Mundi for the evening of 12th March. 49 people turned up, which was very good for a working day. During the prayer service a representative of each congregation gave a short account of their charism and how they were trying to follow it in their present situation. It was an interesting exercise, enlightening and motivating.

As I listened I thought of my coming to Goa 44 years ago. It was a time of ferment and change. Vatican II had ended a few short years earlier and all congregations were busy with *Adaptation and Renewal*. Herder Correspondence had reported that 50,000 religious had left their congregations. Many of these were priests who changed their status to diocesan. Vatican II had made it clear that religious priests were first and foremost consecrated religious - that their priesthood was secondary/accidental to their religious vocation. There was a lobby for the introduction of a married clergy; others were urging that nuns (women) be ordained. Less than two years earlier 14 Canadian Holy Cross priests north of the Darrang River were given orders by the government to leave India overnight. A dozen of our own finally professed Brothers had applied for dispensations. The provincial had drawn up a contingency plan to meet the situation should our Irish and Australian members be asked to leave the country.

When I arrived in Goa alone in March 1971 I was aware of all these factors. What I didn't know was that a letter had been sent to the provincial calling off our would-be foundation in Goa. The letter took ten days to arrive in Calcutta by which time I was on my way to Bombay. It was a time of great political upheaval in Calcutta as well. I was still travelling when 200 Naxalites raided St. Joseph's College. They were looking for the principal. My replacement - Pat Gaffney - was delayed for a month due to exam schedules. Joe Morrissey faced the rabble and was lucky that his head wasn't split open by an axe-wielding intruder. Poor Joe, a chronic migraine sufferer, had severe headaches for weeks after.

A telegram and letter from the Chicalim Comunidade had been sent to the Chief Minister asking him to terminate "the illegal proceedings" in Chicalim. The "illegal proceedings" were the granting of land to the Christian Brothers to start a school. The prayer to the CM was what prompted Tony Mascarenhas to write to the provincial to call off the deal. I was alone; communication was difficult; I had been given 65 days to start a school with seven classes from scratch and a severe back pain was crippling me.





I prayed a lot for enlightenment. Others did also. What I'd like to share are the thoughts that filled my mind at that time - the thoughts which came to me again as I listened to the sharing the other evening.

1. The Brother's vocation is unique. They are not priests (this is the way we are often defined by people who should know better!) and so their lives underscore the value of religious consecration.
2. They are male which satisfies one of the criteria for ordination. This should encourage nuns, who think they are being discriminated against because of gender, to value their own vocation.
3. I believed that founding a community of religious Brothers in an area where there was none would add to the fullness/richness of the church. The presence of the Cloistered Carmel nearby convinced me of this. (I am happy that OWITF more or less echoes this thought.)
4. Let the granting of the land by the comunidade be an earnest of our continuing presence in Goa; otherwise we were "to shake the dust from off our feet." I communicated this to the provincial when he suggested that perhaps I could look around to buy a plot of land elsewhere and be independent.

These were my thoughts 44 years ago. No doubt theologians could pick massive holes in them. We have reached another stage in our life's journey. Everything in the past cannot be canonised. Neither should it be dismissed summarily. Somehow I feel that we have not yet come to grips satisfactorily with what being Brother means. I am cheered by the fact that the two last Popes took the names of Brothers: neither Benedict of Norcia nor Francis of Assisi was an ordained priest. This cannot be pure coincidence. For me personally I don't see any conflict between Brothers serving in well established acclaimed schools and serving the poor elsewhere. I have served in both and been very challenged apostolically - perhaps more so in the former.

Some years ago Jim Maginnis was on holiday in Ireland. He went to *Cluain Mhuire* to get some congregation ties for the Brothers in Calcutta. As the provincial was opening parcels to select ties of different colours, Jim asked: "Is this now the official dress of the Brothers?" John Heneghan replied, "I don't give a damn how they dress once they live as Brothers!" Touche!

Bap Finn

St. Patrick's Feast Day: 2015

17th March is a grand day in Ireland as it is the feast of St. Patrick, their patron saint. We at St. Patrick's H. S. School, Asansol celebrate this day as our Feast Day. The day's programme began with a Cross Country Race. Students, teachers and parents



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assembled in school at 6.00 a.m. The freshness of the morning added to the enthusiastic mood and created a perfect atmosphere. At 6.15a.m. the event was flagged off by our Principal Mr. Nigel D'Souza. Students, teachers, parents, members of SPAAA as well as students from Naidisha took part. There were marshals who guided the students along the route. Every single participant completed the race. The winners were awarded trophies and certificates. There were snacks for all, generously sponsored by Mr. Alok Dhar a member of SPAAA (The Alumni Association).



At 11.00a.m. a High mass was celebrated by Bishop Cyprian Monis, Fr. Lawrence and Fr. Peter. This was followed by lunch to which, the Heads of the neighbouring schools and former teachers of SPS were invited. The traditional Patrician cake was blessed by the Bishop and was cut by our Community Leader Br. Gabriel Thomas. Thus the day was a huge success and like every year it never fails to leave the refrain ringing in our ears.

**“Hail Glorious St. Patrick’s ,
The saint of our isle.....”**

Ruben Bose

VOCATION PROMOTER'S REPORT

The month of March came and went and what a month it was! I can't but not tell you about it.

After a lovely break at home with family it was good to get back to base in the Bow. I began work on a brochure for the Vocation season of April as well as a few letters to boys who had shown interest in the Brothers.

Next on my itinerary was a trip to Odisha to meet up with a young man who has completed his certificate course in technical education and is interested in religious life. I met him along with his family members and got a very warm welcome from them. As part of my visit I got a tour of Rourkela City – a 360° ride on the Ring Road, the Deer Park, all entrances to the bus stand, etc. Through the generosity of an ex-student from SMO NIOS, I also discovered the route to 2 different parishes, got an introduction to the Bishop's House in Rourkela and managed to get permission to attend the Annual Rourkela Diocese Vocation Camp to be held in April.

On my way back to Kolkata, I invited 6 boys to join me for a weekend so that they could meet the Brothers and see the ministry that we are involved in. One of them was unwell, but the others met me at Rourkela railway station. Here is where things got *'interesting'* and how! On the overnight train, while I was asleep, I had a visitor (or two maybe) who left with a few souvenirs. When I got up in the





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GRACE OF OUR EXISTENCE**

KARL RAHNER

morning I discovered that my pant was torn. After I cursed the railways for sharp screws and nails that stick out of the seats, when I went to the toilet I realized that there was not one, but two rips in my pant at very precise places. It is then that I realized that a robber(s) had cut my pant pocket and 'chor pocket' and had made off with my driving license, PAN card and a significant amount of money. As soon as the train stopped at Howrah, I searched the compartment and then lodged a complaint with the Railway Police and am still hoping for some news on the documents.

Nonetheless, we carried on to the Bow and after a good breakfast and baths we began our 2 days of sightseeing. A student from SMO NIOS and his brother came to my rescue to help us travel in public transport. To say that the boys moved around goggle-eyed and open-mouthed would be an understatement for this was a whole new world for 4 out of the 5 of them. The Metro, trams and a mall were the highlights of the trip for them. All 5 of them were very touched by the Brothers hospitality of both the Kolkata communities. At evening prayers on the second evening all of them said that they would like to join us as soon as they complete their current studies.

Immediately after the double celebrations of St. Joseph's and St. Patrick's I was off to Shillong for the Vocation Camp for the North East region. The train travel up to Guwahati was quite traumatic as I kept looking at my pant pockets every 45 minutes and hardly rested a bit. This was surely one of my toughest journeys in a long while.

Grounded by the lack of a license I was not able to travel to Assam or Nagaland to pick up or meet any of the boys who had shown interest in the CBs when Avi and I had visited them in September. As a result no one turned up for the Vocation Camp. Thanks to the Scholasticate, Bipin was sent on his home visit so that he managed to bring with him 3 of the boys who had shown some interest. We (Ryan, Ceddy, Bipin, Eugene, Elvis and I) managed to conduct the camp for the three which was a resounding success. They definitely want to join the CBs and will be welcomed as long as they get the required percentage in their class 10 exams.

While up in Shillong, I was also privileged to be a part of the MIQ Study House for the



(Peter), Manoj, Surin, (Paul), Ajay, Joseph and Sudip at a mall



John Paul, David and Akash from Assam





Farewell of the Class XII boys. There was a lot of emotion in the house as the first years and second years shared and thanked God for the varied experiences and learnings that they had received from the Brothers and fellow students over the past 2 years. Congratulations to all who helped form them.

I returned to Kolkata and was once again given the responsibility of playing tour guide to two boys on their way home from the MIQ Study House who did not manage to clear their class XI exam from St. Edmund's. After a fun day in Kolkata with the now experienced tour guide (me) they were very happy as they headed home.

Prabin and Sumit with me enjoying refreshments



After all the trauma of the theft, the one positive outcome of my ordeal is that I will be in Mumbai with family and friends for Easter, as on Easter Monday I'm off to the RTO to get my duplicate driving license I so desperately need for my two wheeler escapades in the jungles of Jharkhand and rural Rourkela diocese.

As I sign off for this month, I ask your support and prayers in April for the 3 Vocation Camps that are being conducted, one each in Bajpe, Odisha and Kolkata. Many Brothers have already volunteered to help out and even conduct these camps. Please do feel free to help out or join any one of these. Continue to keep us all in your prayers! We need it.

Samson

OUR ONE GREAT FIDELITY

In one of his sermons on the Eucharist, Ronald Knox, made this observation: Throughout two thousand years of history, Christians, both whole churches and individual believers, have consistently been able to ignore many of Jesus' key commandments and invitations. We have either been too weak to follow his counsels or we have rationalized them away in some way.

And so, to a large extent, we have exempted ourselves from the demand to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek when attacked, to forgive 70 times 7, to leave our gift at the altar and first go and seek reconciliation with our brother before we worship, to place justice on the same level as worship, to see mercy as more important than dogma, to not commit adultery, to not steal, to not call someone a fool, to not tell lies, to not give in to jealousy. We have, in virtually every one of these areas, individually and collectively, a history of infidelity and rationalization.

But we have, for the most part, been faithful and consistent throughout all the years to one of Jesus' commands, to celebrate the Eucharist, to meet together in every circumstance and share his word and break bread and drink wine in his memory.

The older I get, the more this bald fact becomes more meaningful to me, both as it pertains to the Church and as it pertains to me personally.





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Whenever possible, I try to celebrate Eucharist every day, for many reasons. The Eucharist contains and carries many deep realities: It helps continue the incarnation of God in history, it is God's physical embrace, it is an intensification of our community together as Christians, it is the new manna which God gives to nurture his people, it is our family meal together as believers, it is Christ's sacrifice which we commemorate ritually, it is God's gift of reconciliation and forgiveness, it is an invitation to a deeper discipleship, it is a banquet table opened up for the poor, it is a vigil service within which we wait for Christ to return, and it is Christ's priestly prayer for the world.

But I go to Eucharist daily too for another reason, a more personal one: This is the one place where I can be faithful, where I can essentially measure up. I can't always control how I feel or how I think and I can't always measure up morally and spiritually, but, inside of my perpetual inadequacy and occasional doubt and confusion, I can be faithful in this one deep way. I can go to the Eucharist regularly.

The older I get, the more meaningful this becomes. With age, I am growing less confident or sure about my knowledge of God, religion, and life. As knowledge deepens, it also widens and begins to take on softer edges. Unlike the more-confident years of my youth, I now live with the sense that my understanding of God's ways are a long ways from being adequate, let alone normative. The mystery we live in is huge and the more we grasp the magnitude of the cosmic and spiritual world, the more we grasp too how ineffable is God. God truly is beyond us, beyond language, beyond imagination, and even beyond feeling. We can know God, but can never understand God. And so we must be more humble, both in our theology and in our ecclesiology. Mostly we don't know what we are doing. The Eucharist, since it is the one ritual given us by Jesus himself, is one of our places of confidence.

Moreover, the older I get, the more I see too how blind I am to my own hypocrisies and how weak and rationalizing is my human nature. I don't always know when I'm rationalizing, or biased, or following Christ properly. And, even when I do, I don't always have the strength or will to do what I know is right. And so I lean heavily on the invitation that Jesus left us on the night before he died, to break bread and drink wine in his memory and to trust that this, if all else is uncertain, is what I should be doing while I wait for him to return.

Sometimes when he was instructing a couple for marriage, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran priest and martyr, would caution them with words to this effect: Right now, you are in love and you believe that your love can sustain your marriage. It can't. But your marriage can sustain your love!

The Eucharist is such a ritual-container for Christians. We can't sustain our faith, charity, forgiveness, and hope on the basis of feeling or thought, but we can sustain them through the Eucharist. We can't always be clear-headed or warm-hearted; we can't always be sure that we know the exact path of God; and we won't always measure up morally and humanly to what faith asks of us. But we can be faithful in this one, deep way: We can go to the Eucharist regularly.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser

