



Ratisbonne Newsletter

March 2010

Message of the Rector...



Dear Friends,

*"For see the winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.
Flowers are appearing on
the earth. The season of
glad songs has come, the
cooing of the turtledove is*

found in our land." With these beautiful words the author of the Old Testament book, *"The Song of Songs"*, describes the departure of winter and the arrival of spring. The last edition of the Ratisbonne Newsletter went to press in late December, a few days after an unusually mild Christmas.

Shortly afterwards temperatures dropped significantly and the months of January and February brought significantly colder weather and some days of heavy rain to Jerusalem. But the last week here has been unseasonably warm and sunny, so it really does feel like *"winter is past"*. And in just a couple of week's time it will be Holy Week and our Community will be preparing for the celebration of Easter



In January we welcomed three new confreres to our Community. Fr Biju Michael, who had previously belonged to the Guwahati province in north east India, arrived from Rome where he had been completing his doctoral studies. He has taken on the important role as lecturer in Moral Theology. The two 1st Year students from West Africa, Br Paul Turay from Sierra Leone and Br Paul Ajah from Nigeria, who had their first application for Israeli entry visas turned down by the Ministry of the Interior in July 2009, were eventually granted them in December. This was in large part due to the active support of the staff at the Papal Nunciature in Jerusalem, especially the Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Franco, who has shown himself a great friend of our Community. I am happy to report that Fr Biju, Br Paul and Br Emmanuel have all settled down very well in their new home.

Last week I accompanied four of our students who will be making their final vows this coming summer to the Passionist retreat centre at Bethany for a 24 hour retreat. Bethany was the home of Jesus' close friends, Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and today the small Passionist Community continues to offer warm hospitality to pilgrims and those looking for peace and quiet. The grounds of the retreat centre were a mass of colour: a carpet of wild flowers – red anemones and white daisies – spread out under the olive trees. Sadly at the furthest end of the grounds the stark 12 foot concrete slabs of the grey security barrier now separate the retreat centre from the Franciscan Church dedicated to Martha, Mary and Lazarus and the latter's tomb close by. How many stones still need to be rolled back and how many people released from what binds and imprisons them before our world experiences the peace the Risen Jesus came to bring?

May that Risen Jesus bring you and those dearest to you the blessings and graces of Easter 2010. Our prayers and thoughts are with you.

Francis Preston SDB

Inter-seminary gathering, February 2010



Playing together, praying together, eating together, singing and dancing together: simple things, but of great value. Sharing something of one's own experience mean to give something important which leads to making others richer. I think this is the principal aim of the inter-seminary gathering, organized in the Salesian house of Bethlehem some weeks ago. It is one of the occasions which links the different seminaries present in the Holy Land. Salesians, Franciscans, Diocesan Seminarians, White Fathers total more than 100 young men who are studying and preparing themselves to become priests in the near future, but first of all are called to give their daily witness in a land thirsty for Christ. Being

together gives us strength, courage, and the awareness of our presence and mission in this territory. The different charismas and spiritualities represent a richness worthy to share and shows the greatness of the Church.

Every community took part in the sports and presented itself during the soiree. Between one and the other there was the just rest, at first spiritual, through the prayer, and then physical, with a generous supper. At the end, apart from declaring who was the winner of ours sports competition, I'm certain everybody enjoyed the meeting thoroughly. Saying "see you soon", we expressed our real will and hope to continue to walk together. A dream, when one is alone, remains only a dream; but together, and with the help of God, we can realize it!

Br. Giampaolo Nicastro

Christian Unity: The Status Quo

"May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you." These familiar words of Jesus in John 17 continue to echo into our modern era. In the land of our Lord's ministry, we can ask ourselves, how is this intention being fulfilled today? Are the less than 2% of Christians who live on this hallowed ground united or divided? These questions could be addressed in a number of ways. Perhaps, if we briefly analyze the geographic heart of our faith, the Church of the Holy Sepulcre, we may receive some indicators on the health of Christianity in the current state of Israel.

Possibly not very well-known to many Christians is the fact that the grounds of the Sepulcre are shared among several Christian Churches: Latins, Greeks, Armenians, Coptics, and Ethiopians. Authoritative power within the holy places is limited to the first three listed. During the days of the Ottoman Empire a tentative agreement, called the Status Quo, was judicially brokered by the Turkish court in 1852. Its highly complex nature was born from centuries of struggle to determine who had proper guardianship over this sacred site among others.

Without getting lost in the hallways of history, we can take a cursory glance at how this began. Turkish dominion arose after the Mameluk Sultanate collapsed in 1517. The Ottomans were naturally disposed to favor their Greek subjects over the Latins who were supported by European Powers. For nearly three hundred years prior to Turkish rule, the Franciscans peacefully held the possession of all the Holy Places excepting the chapel built illegally by the Copts behind the edicule of the Holy Sepulcre in 1537.

In the year 1633, the struggles for control between the Latins and Greeks began. After changing hands many times over the centuries, it finally reached a breaking point in the mid-19th century. This led to the establishment of the Status Quo which was forcefully imposed and remains in effect today. An acceptable level of peace is maintained so long as no one violates the smallest letter of the law. Measured by the Gospel ideal, one quickly sees this arrangement's gaping deficiencies.

Even if perfect agreement is attained on guardianship and precedence over all the holy sites, our natural diversity would necessitate an agreement to respect one another's legitimate traditions. The heart of the problem lies not in an agreement like the Status Quo but in the spirit by which it is carried out. Christ did pray for unity but he also taught, "It is by your love for one another, that everyone will recognize you as my disciples." This is the element most lacking, love for one another. In a land burning for peace since its inception, the witness to charity and forgiveness is not only helpful but essential.

Br. Matthew DeGance

LABORERS OF THE HARVEST



What can I say about me? First, I'm the most handsome member of this community...yes it's true! My name is Giuseppe Di Sario, and I'm from the south of Italy, Brindisi. This is a small but nice city on the Adriatic Sea. I'm 32 years old. I'm studying theology in Jerusalem. For the past 5 years, I've been a happy Salesian on the way to priesthood. God was waiting for me in Madagascar seven years ago when, with my second level degree in Pedagogy and ready to work, I went there and had an experience with the Salesian community. I fell in love with Him, with the children and with Don Bosco. I've always frequented the Salesian oratory in my city but nothing had happened before I went to Madagascar. It was not easy to suddenly change my life but it was a great choice! After my pre-novitiate and novitiate, I became Salesian and after my philosophical degree I went to Albania for my practical training. It was a great experience! Two magical years were spent working hard in our school, oratory and in our Poor Children Center. The poverty of these young people gave me the opportunity to better understand God's Love and how much we can do offering our life!

Br. Giuseppe Di Sario

When in 1999 I came for the first time to the Holy Land for a pilgrimage, I was sure Jerusalem would come again into my life. Of course I didn't know how, because I was 16 and I absolutely did not imagine becoming Salesian, but that experience was so strong that I brought it always with me. Now here I am, and I feel myself very fortunate. My name is Giampaolo. I'm from Naples, Italy, and this is my first year in Ratisbonne. I like to say that my vocation is an experience of Salesian Family. First of all, I knew Don Bosco at home, through the witness of my parents; then, at least four groups of the Salesian Family were important for me in different ways: SDB, in the oratory and parish, FMA, at primary school, Salesian Cooperators and TR (Witnesses of the Resurrection). If I had to choose a word to describe myself, there is no doubt it would be "music"! This is true not only because I "live" with my guitar but I enjoy composing music as well. Music was the soul of Don Bosco's oratory, and today it is Don Bosco's heritage for us who carry on his dream. Music is sign of joy, of a feast; it is a "place" to express emotions, and to know one another better. It is a way to bring young people closer to God. Let us try to make our life a concert. Don Bosco will be happy!



Br. Giampaolo Nicastro



My name is Viktor Mokriy. I'm 26 years old, and I'm the only Ukrainian Salesian here at Ratisbonne. Really, I don't remember when I first met Don Bosco. I remember that I wanted to be a priest and I didn't like the congregations that were in my city. The diocesan seminary was not attractive to me, either. When I was almost finished with school, I was invited to a summer camp in St. Petersburg. It was organized by the Salesians. So in that way, I saw who the Salesians were and what they did. I went there also the following year with the decision to try this way of life. My Salesian journey began in Ukraine near the city of Lviv. At that time there were only a few Salesians, but they did everything they could to get the young to become Salesians including bribing, blackmailing and other traditional Salesian practices....it worked! I did my pre-novitiate in Ukraine and also one year of novitiate in Italy, where I continued for the 3 next years. My practical training was back in Ukraine at a school in Lviv. Now, I find myself studying in the Holy Land. Where will I go next? The Lord only knows!

Br. Victor Mokrij

Hi, I am Neelam Ratna Kumar. I was born on January 4, 1983 in a village called Vennanapudi (India.) I have two elder brothers and one younger sister. My parents are Mr. Lazar and Mrs. Rose Mary. As soon as I finished my elementary school, I left my village for further studies and I was admitted in a diocesan boarding. It was here that I came in contact with a Salesian vocation promoter. This is where I was hooked into the Salesian family! I was impressed by the Salesian charism; in a more specific way, our work for the children on the street. My work with this type of boys reinforced my enthusiasm for the priesthood. My hobbies include music, video editing and reading.



Br. Ratna Neelam



From the viewpoint of the world, I was born July 15, 1981 in a suburb of Milan called Sesto San Giovanni. My Christian birth took place on August 2nd of the same year. I'm the firstborn child. After me is Federico, 3 years younger, and Eleonora Laura, 16 years my junior. I fulfilled my studies in Sesto at the Salesian school "Opere Sociali Don Bosco". While there I was part of a missionary group. In the summer of 2000, I left for a missionary experience in Ethiopia at the Salesian oratory of Mekanissa, Addis Abeba. This event was very formative. I returned home and chose to continue technical studies at the Polytechnic of Milan to become a mechanical engineer. My personal plan was to become a lay volunteer specialized for the Salesian professional schools in the missions. However, this wasn't the plan God had in mind! After a few years, I understood that He chose me for a radical life and I was called to respond radically. I left my "soft dreams" of the missions for plans of another which became my

own. So, for me and the Salesian Congregation, I was born 8 September 2004. During my Salesian formation, I studied philosophy in Nave (Berscia-Italy) and spent practical training in Sesto San Giovanni working as a catechist of the Orientation-Technical-Professional (OTP) as well as teaching Religion, Mate, Mechanical Technology, Design, and the Lathe machine. During my last year of practical training, I was co-responsible for the group of aspirants and I fulfilled my university studies. During the last two summers I have been in Vilnius (Lithuania) as an assistant in our summer oratory and learning this difficult language. If it is in the plan of God, I will work in this country where the Salesians have the project to open a professional school. Now I'm here in Jerusalem at Ratisbonne. I feel that my Salesian vocation is not yet complete. Our Lord is calling me to the priesthood and I don't know any other place in which to study and live theology better than the Holy Land.

Br. Edoardo Gnocchini