

CARMEL CONTACT

from the Australian Carmelites

No. 44, November 1999

CHRISTMAS: this is our story!

East Timor, Kosovo, Chechnya... whenever and wherever crises are felt, people tend to ask whether they really should celebrate an occasion like Christmas. Some would go as far as posing a moral question about celebrating amidst the poverty and suffering of so many others.

We have been hearing this dilemma every year in the Philippines, a place where there is so much deprivation and want. Indeed, this is a real question especially for people who associate Christmas with extravagant shopping sprees, sumptuous feasts and expensive gifts.

But Filipinos love to go shopping during the season, to prepare something special for *Noche Buena* and give gifts to family, relatives, friends and godchildren. Is this right?

Filipinos are well known for their tenacity for living and for creating a joy-filled life. While having little to live by, Filipinos have many things to live for and to hope for. In fact, despite the hardships, we still have a very low rate of suicide. We love celebrating life, aware that in the

struggle the Messiah is with us – his people.

Beginning in the first week of December, Christmas parties are held in the Philippines right up to the first week of January. A Christmas celebration is not complete without food. No matter

meet Jesus whose purpose in coming is to share His very self with the world. If we keep this in our hearts we will be able to celebrate Christmas with creativity.

The first Christmas did not take place in the best of times.

The Christmas story is a story of a child born in a manger. It is a story of a man who lived a simple life with a carpenter as a father and a peasant as a mother. It is a story of God's manifestation in human history: an incarnation into littleness and service in the midst of Roman domination. It is the beginning of a story about a person who

suffered, died and rose again. It is our story!

Our celebration does not have to be held in the most ideal economic and political situation. The qualities that make up the Christmas story are humility, faith, obedience to God and hope. To have them, we need to empty ourselves and put our trust in the God who is always with us – Emmanuel.

Fr Dodo Reforeal, OCarm



how poor people are, there is always a special food on the table for that day. In Filipino culture food is used both to gather and to share. However, this rich symbol is threatened by the influence of another symbol: money. Food unites, money divides. Even though we need money to have food, it should not determine the mood of the celebration.

We need to go back to the original purpose of the food, to share and unite, to be able to

East Timor Appeal

East Timor has been in the news for quite some time and we have all heard of the many atrocities and injustices which took place there. The Carmelite friars and sisters in East Timor were not spared these times of anxiety and fear. All had to leave East Timor while the atrocities were taking place and now that some semblance of peace has been restored, they are all back trying to rebuild the country and themselves physically and psychologically.

In East Timor there are five convents of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and sixteen Carmelite friars in various stages of formation. One friar is solemnly professed, nine are simply professed, three are second year novices and three more are first year novices. It is obvious that they still need to be accompanied in their formation. However, at present they have no one to help them since the Indonesian friars are not allowed to go to East Timor.

The Australian Province is willing to take these sixteen friars and look after their formation if they cannot return to Indonesia. However, the Australian Province will need much assistance for air fares, ordinary maintenance, studies, transport, etc. We put our trust in God's providence and in Our Lady's protection and we appeal to your generosity.

*Fr Anthony Scerri, OCarm
General Councillor for
the Asian Region*

Dear Father David,

I would like to support the Carmelites students from East Timor, Indonesia and India. Please find enclosed my donation of \$100 \$50 \$25 \$10 or \$.....

Or please debit my Bankcard Visa card Mastercard Expiry Date/.....

Cardholder: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode _____

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Carmel Around the World

50th Anniversary of the Return of Carmelites to Aylesford

This year, on 31 October, the British Province celebrated the 50th anniversary of the return of the Carmelites to Aylesford.

Aylesford Priory was founded in 1242 on land donated by English Crusader, Sir Richard Grey of Condor. It was home to the Carmelites until its dissolution by Henry VIII in 1538. In 1949 "The Friars" was put up for sale and the Carmelites purchased it back. The repossession took place on the Vigil of All Saints, 31 October 1949.

50th Anniversary of "The Leaven"

This year is the Golden Jubilee

of the Secular Institute "The Leaven", and its affiliation to the Carmelite Order. The members of a Secular Institute live a life dedicated to God in the heart of the world.

In 1949 the Institute had only 3 members. At present "The Leaven" has 22 members. They do not live in community but in their own homes in different parts of Great Britain. In spite of this, their spirit of community and love is very strong and each of them knows they are supported by the others. They meet once a year for an annual retreat; they also have two or three renewal weekends each year and a meeting once a month in different areas of the country.

The apostolate of "The Leaven" is the Church's mission: to reveal Christ to all. In the Institute there are teachers, nurses, secretaries, factory workers and social workers. Their aim is to sanctify their work and environment by personal witness, transforming presence, encouraging words.

Well, they would have:

- asked directions,
- arrived on time
- helped deliver the baby
- cleaned the stable
- made a casserole, and
- brought sensible gifts!

Fr Esmeraldo (Dodo) Reforeal



The wonderful sight of a rainbow greeted me when my plane landed in Sydney. It was such a great welcome, filled with hope. When I arrived in Melbourne, three other rainbows were there at the airport – Paul, Francis and Agung! I came to Australia on June 18 this year.

I would like to start this article with my impressions about Australia and its people. I found the country very vast with many possibilities and resources. I reckon that this is one of the reasons why Australia is inhabited by many people from different countries and different cultures. The people exhibit warmth and respect for one another. I know that this is my “honeymoon period” and in the process of living here and meeting other people, I will be able to discover and experience many things.

I want to share to you a little about my country, the Carmelites in my country and myself.

■ The Philippines

I come from The Philippines. The name carries with it the name of King Philip of Spain as it was colonized by Spain. It is a long and painful history of domination but it has also given us something: it sowed the seed of Christianity. And that seed has grown. Catholics

constitute about 80% of the population. They are scattered all over the 7,100 islands (during high tide!). The country has eight major languages and almost a hundred dialects. The Filipinos are known for their religiosity, warmth, hospitality and sense of community.

■ Carmel in the Philippines

The Carmelites (O.Carm.) in the Philippines were established by the Dutch confrères in 1958. Since then we have become a Commissariat of the Dutch Province. We hope to become an independent province by the year 2000.

Carmel in the Philippines is serving the people by sharing its spirituality in its parishes, schools, formation programs, social action programs and retreat/recollection facilitation. Recently, we have added three programs on spirituality and the media and a seminar house.

The Commissariat is composed of 57 members: 32 solemnly professed, 11 simply professed and 14 associate members. We have 7 novices, 3 postulants and 20 aspirants who are from our college seminary or young professionals. We have 5 monasteries of cloistered nuns and a little over 1000 Lay Carmelites.

■ "Dodo"

I will begin my own introduction by providing you with a name that is easy to remember: Dodo. I like to say that I am the only living dodo (a large, flightless bird). I am committed to following its example of keeping its “two feet on the ground”. Well, it is only my nickname. My real name is Esmeraldo Reforeal. I am the seventh of eight siblings. I was gifted with loving and caring parents, Ariston and Rosario. They were always there for us in times of joy

and achievement as well as trouble and difficulties. I was born on August 8, 1968. I grew up in a rural area and lived in an urban area while studying. I was exposed to the tenets of faith in my childhood years and most of my studies were done in a Catholic setting. I attribute my vocation to these experiences especially in the family.

I was in a Diocesan seminary for two years before transferring to the Carmelites. In the seminary I completed my Bachelors degree in Sociology and Masters degree in Pastoral Ministry. I was simply professed on May 30, 1992. I solemnly professed my vows on July 28 1996. I was ordained on December 29 1996. Between my solemn profession and coming here, I worked as a formator in charge of pastoral formation for our theology students and as the Vocation Director of the Carmelites and Executive Trustee for the Centre that runs our program for spirituality, media and the seminar house.

I am here to study Spirituality. I hope that it will help Carmel in the Philippines and maybe other Carmelite provinces in discerning and charting our perspective for the next millennium.



Reflection

Prayer for the Star

Fr Bernard Shah, OCarm

The Christmas Star points the way to the Millennium, to the Jubilee of the arrival of Jesus Christ, God's way of being human. Maybe the light shines less brightly now, obscured by the clouds of war and ethnic cleansing, of injustice and manipulation, of the commercialization of God's gifts of sun and sea and holiday.

But it shines if we believe in it and its promise. It shines if we ask the Lord of All for the grace of seeing his goodness again, of seeing his hope again, of knowing his love again. The prayers make up the image of the Star: we can journey with the Star each day with one or all of them – in a quiet time and a quiet place we know is unlikely to be invaded. We journey with the Star – in trust



The shepherds saw a great light

a light at once blinding and comforting. In our time it might be the threatening torches of militia or the flames of a burning village.

Help us to be your light, Jesus – light of acceptance, practical help, loyalty in listening.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.

The star stood over the place

The darkness of the wise men's searching was dispelled by the Star shining over Bethlehem, 'place of bread' for the hungry. The darkness of our searching this century has been pierced by the lights of Hammarskjöld, Teresa of Calcutta, Romero...

Help us to recognise the people of courage and hope, lights for the way.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.



A star shone in the east

Then it was the light of Christmas, showing the way to shepherd and wise man. Now it is more likely to be a mushroom cloud in Asia, searchlights over Serbia, fire after earthquake.

Show us your light, Jesus. Give us strength and courage.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.



The light shines in the darkness

The first century of the first Millennium must have tested the belief of every Christian. At the end of the first Millennium there was fear, and wonder whether the world would go on. There is something of that as we approach this Millennium: for some that brings despair, for some determination to survive at whoever's cost, for some – though they may not see it this way – seeking after signs and portents, and so losing trust in Jesus, who did say *I am with you always*.

Help us to see you, Jesus, as a star that never falters, light that is never quenched.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.



Herod took counsel

Governments fear for their power, then as now. Compromise, who will benefit more, deals and counter deals. Government of the people by the powerful – for the governors.

Help us to speak and act against injustice... to help the poor and the powerless... to be you standing against the unjust.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.

Wise men bringing gifts

They seem strange to us, those gifts – symbols of wealth and kingship and death – but they were right for their purpose: to acknowledge God-with-us. What gifts can I bring to God-in-my-world? Listening to my family... pleasantness at work... being prepared to lend a hand... actively working for justice...?

Jesus, help us to use the gifts you've given us for others.

Bring us peace, Prince of Peace.

