



THE MONK AND THE MISSIONARY

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Summer 2011

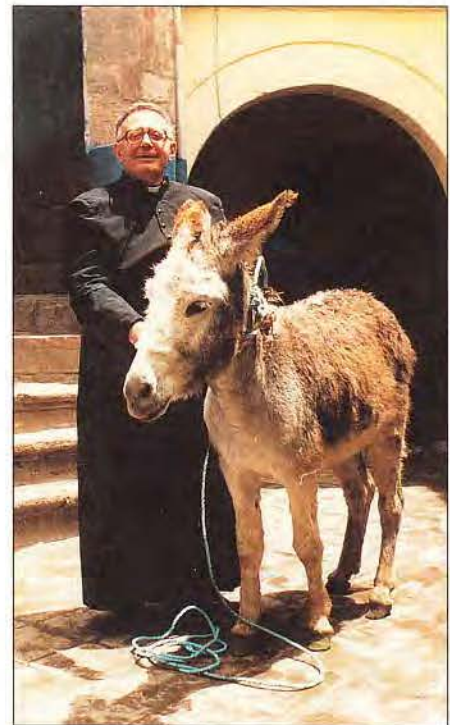
A few weeks ago Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey received the visit of a saintly missionary, Father Giovanni Salerno, founder of the Missionary Servants of the Poor of the Third World, whom we have known for many years, through his visits, both at Fontgombault Abbey in France and, now, here in Oklahoma. He and his fellow missionary, Father Vincent, came to ask, not for money or other material resources, but for the monks' prayers. As he reminded us, once upon a time the earlier missionaries in Peru (where Father Giovanni works) came to the convent of Saint Teresa of Avila to ask the very same thing.

- *Rather than try to explain why we have accepted to help these particular missionaries — without abandoning our contemplative form of life — I would rather let you read the letter he sent to me upon returning to Peru. Perhaps you will catch some of the "flame" that animates him when he speaks.*

Dear Father Abbot,

Laudetur Iesus Christus! From the distant Andes Mountains, I send you my best wishes of health and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Before everything, I would like to thank you and your community for the warm welcome and hospitality with which you received Fr. Vincent and me. I left your Abbey very nostalgic and very moved by the great example of dedication and silence that you gave us. Those few days in the Abbey were for me like a course in Ignatian spiritual exercises; they were an unforgettable gift. As I promised, I am sending the stories of the three young people, which are very significant in that they express the principal motive of our missionary lives and the indispensable work of evangelization.

Timothy was a young man born in Cotabamas. On account of poor nourishment and hard labor in the fields, he came down with tuberculosis, and when they called us to help him, we found him vomiting liters of blood. He was very weak and he was in despair because he was leaving



Father Giovanni Salerno, founder of The Servants of the Poor of the Third World.

seven children as orphans and in poverty. After giving him some relief, food, medicine, and decent clothes, I concerned myself with preparing him to meet the Lord. I read him the verses of the Gospel in which Jesus tells us to trust in Him, for He helps the orphan and



Young girls learn to perform their native Peruvian dances.

the widow. He did not know that Jesus felt this way about the poor, having thought that Jesus was a judge who severely punished all those who broke His commandments. Each day I would visit him and give him shots, and we would discuss Jesus' love for sinners and the suffering. Each day I would find him more and more serene. The tuberculosis was joined by other infections and he began to worsen. I invited him to trust in God, saying that God is a loving father and that He would care for

his children with generosity and love. When I had administered the Last Rites, he told me: "I was desperate, but now I die wealthy because I leave my children to Jesus;" and he quietly fell asleep in the Lord. God is indeed a loving father, and Timothy's wife and children were well taken care of. With the help of some friends, I brought two of the children to Italy and they are now professionals.

Since childhood Gregory had lived in the jungle as a slave, harvesting cocoa. Malaria is prevalent in the jungle, and Gregory contracted it when he was seventeen. He was hardly able to walk on his own feet when he came to our home. We did everything we could to help him, but above all we prepared him for Baptism and his First Communion, which he received with much enthusiasm and devotion. Because his situation was so grave, we put him in the Regional Hospital of Cusco. We would bring him his food because in the hospital it was not included. When his condition worsened, he did not want to eat anything, and he began to refuse the things he used to like, such as orange juice. We offered him milk and juice and tried to persuade him to take it, but he would just shake his head. However, when we asked if he would like to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, he got up immediately — something he wouldn't do before — and said: "Yes, this is what I want, because I want to go where He is." He received the Eucharist and he slowly fell asleep in the Lord.

Gregory suffered much in the jungle because he had been treated as a slave, that is to say, even worse than the treatment of animals. Sadly, the only opportunity for escape is to contract malaria or Leishmaniasis, which is a sickness like leprosy. Only when your life is threatened with sickness or disease, will they allow you to be free.

None of us can forget Natividad. She was from a family of eleven children who were and still are very poor. We accepted the five younger siblings of Natividad, but we were not going to accept her because she could help her mother at home, finding firewood and carrying water. Regardless, she came every day to the cafeteria to help with the catechesis

for those about to make their first communion. One day, Natividad left the cafeteria and did not return home. Her mother came to us very concerned, asking about her, and we were all very surprised that she had not made it home. We searched for her all night, and the following day we found her on the bank of a river, dead with marks suggesting that she had been strangled. You can imagine the suffering of her parents, especially her mother who seemed inconsolable.



Eager faces in the classroom.

One morning the mother came to give us good news. The night before she had a dream in which she saw Natividad, dressed in white in the middle of a field of lilies, who told her: “Do not cry, I am well and I can help you more than before. Now I will tell you what happened so you can give testimony: While I was waiting for the bus to return home, some youths kidnapped me and took me to an abandoned house next to the river. There they got drunk while I was tied up. Then, one tried to abuse me, but I saw what he wanted to do, and I was able to pull scissors from my book bag and defend my purity; he was so angry he strangled me. Go to the abandoned house and in the bushes next to the river you will find the scissors and the cord they used to strangle me.” The mother went to the house and found the things, just as Natividad had said.

The rest of the girls from the cafeteria found out what happened, and they saw a great similarity between Natividad and St. Maria Goretti, who had also died in defense of her purity. They decided, then, to form a group called “St. Maria Goretti” and they would have Natividad as their intercessor. The group was founded for girls to vow to Jesus that they would like lives of the holy virtue of purity. When the time came to open our schools, we wanted to put the girls’ school under the protection of Saint Maria Goretti, so as to offer her life as an example of holiness and to remember the life of the girl who had lived among us — Natividad — as one who had been able to live like the Saint.

For our Missionary Servants of the Poor it is a great privilege to represent the Church and the Holy Father in the midst of the poor. When the missions of the Third World are spoken of, many think that the best way to help the poor is to address their material needs: clothing, medicine, food, etc. In my life as missionary, after forty-six years, I have realized that the greatest gift we can give the poor is God and His divine grace through the Sacraments of the Church.

The Missionary Servants of the Poor of the Third World was founded to obey the Holy Father John Paul II



Brother Raphael teaches catechism to the children at the Yarcaccunca Mission.

his who told us: "Go and serve the poor with empty hands, but with the treasures of the Church." Because of this our charism is marked by a profound love of the Holy Eucharist, with a tender and filial devotion to Mary the Mother of Jesus and all the poor, and an absolute fidelity to the Holy Father and the Magisterium. If we have asked for help from the Benedictine Abbey of Clear Creek, it is not primarily for economic help but for assistance in circulating our newsletter in English so that in this way American youths, full of faith and generosity, might dedicate their lives to God and come to serve the indigenous of the Andes Mountains. We believe that the greatest gift to the needy is God.

I cannot forget the countless holy missionaries from the United States, from the St. James Association founded by Cardinal Cushing in Boston. Since the beginning of my missionary life I have had much contact with them, and they have served as a great example of dedication and service to the poor. I am deeply grateful to them. Cardinal Cushing, when he visited Peru in the early days of the St. James Association, also thought the solution to the poverty in Peru was to give money to the poor; but when he realized the true plight of the poor, he threw the checkbook on the ground and said to the missionaries: "Bring Christ to the poor!" By virtue of our Statutes, as Missionary Servants of the Poor, we can ask for collections in any parish or anywhere in the world, but instead we ask for a true conversion in those we meet because there is no greater service to the poor than to provide a deep transformation in ourselves. If we truly focus on this — our own conversions in Christ — the material needs will take care of themselves.

We give thanks to God for having given us the assistance of the Benedictines of Clear Creek, for in this way they accompany us with their prayers and their lives of sacrifice. To know this gives us courage as we embark on the same mission as Jesus: to destroy the sin in man and to raise more saints in the Church, without ignoring the hunger and needs of the poor, as the Lord did. We want to always give importance to seeking the Kingdom of God, because we know and find this as we work with the more than 1500 children which we feed, clothe, and doctor each day. How beautiful it is to test the truth of these words: "Seek first the Reign of God and his divine justice, and He will provide the rest."

It is clear from Father Giovanni Salerno's letter that he understands the priorities of missionary work. First and foremost, we must bring Christ to the poor. But as he states at the end of his letter, the Missionary Servants also feed, clothe, and doctor more than 1500 children each day. This obviously takes material resources. The monks here at Clear Creek Abbey have agreed to serve as Fr. Salerno's "home base" here in the United States. In the future we will handle all gifts and correspondence. As we have promised, we will not share the addresses of the Friends of Clear Creek Abbey with other organizations, but if your charity would like to support these fine missionaries in some way — or receive their newsletter — they can be contacted at this address:

**Friends of the Missionary Servants of the Poor
5800 W. Monastery Road
Hulbert, OK 74441**

In Our Lord and Our Lady,

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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