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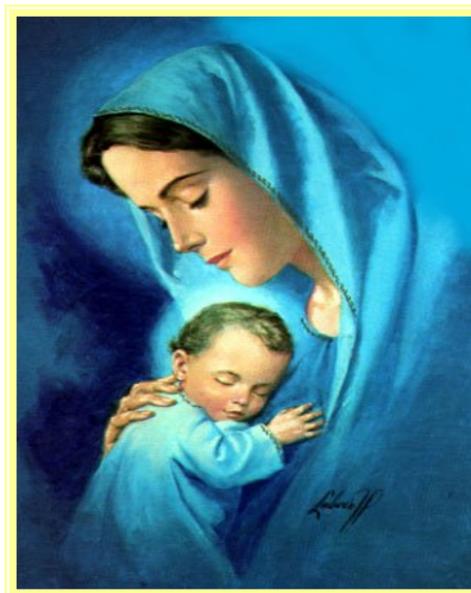
MARY IS BLESSED BECAUSE SHE BELIEVED

By His Holiness Pope John Paul II*

Mary did not directly receive this apostolic mission. She was not among those whom Jesus sent "to the whole world to teach all nations" (cf. Mt. 28:19) when he conferred this mission on them. But she was in the Upper Room, where the Apostles were preparing to take up this mission with the coming of the Spirit of Truth: she was present with them. In their midst Mary was "devoted to prayer" as the "mother of Jesus" (cf. Acts 1:13-14), of the Crucified and Risen Christ. And that first group of those who in faith looked "upon Jesus as the author of salvation," (LG, 9) knew that Jesus was the Son of Mary, and that she was his Mother, and that as such she was from the moment of his conception and birth a unique witness to the mystery of Jesus, that mystery which before their eyes had been disclosed and confirmed in the Cross and Resurrection. Thus, from the very first moment, the Church "looked at" Mary through Jesus, just as she "looked at" Jesus through Mary. For the Church of that time and of every time Mary is a singular witness to the years of Jesus' infancy and hidden life at Nazareth, when she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19; cf. Lk. 2:51).

But above all, in the Church of that time and of every time Mary was and is the one who is "blessed because she believed"; she was the first to believe. From the moment of the Annunciation and conception, from the moment of his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, Mary followed Jesus step by step in her maternal pilgrimage of faith. She followed him during the years of his hidden life at Nazareth; she followed him also during the time after he left home, when he began "to do and to teach" (cf. Acts 1:1) in the midst of Israel. Above all she followed him in the tragic experience of Golgotha. Now, while Mary was with the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem at the dawn of the Church, her faith, born from the words of the Annunciation, found confirmation. The angel had said to her then: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great...and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." The recent events on Calvary had shrouded that promise in

darkness, yet not even beneath the Cross did Mary's faith fail. She had still remained the one who, like Abraham, "in hope believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). But it is only after the Resurrection that hope had shown its true face and the promise had begun to be transformed into reality. For Jesus, before returning to the Father, had said to the Apostles: "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age**" (cf. Mt. 28:19-20). Thus had spoken the one who by his Resurrection had revealed himself as the conqueror of death, as the one who possessed the kingdom of which, as the angel said, "there will be no end."



**Excerpts from Redemptoris Mater, no. 26, the Pope's Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church, Rome 25 March 1987*

My Dear Friends,

September 1, 2007

The feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated each year on the eighth of September. Usually it is the custom of the church to celebrate the feast day of a saint on the date of their death as this is truly their "die natalis", which is the day remembered as their birth into everlasting happiness. On the part of our Blessed Mother Mary, she entered this world sinless through the privilege of the Immaculate Conception and is the firstborn of the redeemed. Her nativity is a cause for great joy as it is considered the "dawn of our salvation." As such, Mary is the "Premier Christifier" and herself as the first product of "Missionary Christification".

Let us celebrate with joyful hearts the birth of the Virgin Mary, of whom was born Christ our Lord. It is with these two themes of both the approach of light and joy that we celebrate with great happiness and festive nature on this beautiful feast of Mary's birthday.

Fr. Augustin Miciano, SDB
Missions Animation Office



MIRACLE IN EAST TIMOR

It was in the year 1999, when Fr. Wong was assigned at that time in Don Bosco Church in Dili, East Timor. The country was still then under the rule of Indonesia. Since there was a clamor among the Timorese people to achieve independence, a referendum was held in favor of independence. Such result did not sit well with the Indonesians and many clashes ensued with the Timorese people. There were about 10,000 Timorese who sought refuge in Don Bosco that was large enough to accommodate them. Fortunately, before the crisis began, tons of rice was already delivered in Don Bosco Church which served as the distribution center of rice to the Timorese.

On the evening of September 6, 1999, an East Timorese soldier belonging to the paramilitary branch and a good friend of Fr. Wong warned him of an impending attack by a group of Indonesian soldiers who were going to attack Don Bosco the next evening and kill everybody inside.

The next day, September 7, the four Salesian priests conferred on what measures to do. After the meeting, they gathered the refugees in the gymnasium and told them their plan. The four priests would meet the soldiers outside the gate when they came, and try to negotiate with them. In the meantime, the people would stay 500 meters inside the steel gates.

In the event that they failed to negotiate and were shot instead, the people would rush and climb the walls at the back of the compound and run to the hills beyond. There, the guerillas would keep them safe. So, they set up ladders for the children and woman to climb.



That night, the priests took turns by pairs to stand guard. All was quiet. Fr. Wong and another Salesian priest took their turn at midnight. Around 2:00 am of September 8, the birthday of Our Lady, they suddenly heard the roar of trucks approaching. The priests peeped through the steel gates and watched the truckloads of soldiers approaching. As the soldiers, alighted from the trucks, they began firing their guns and throwing hand grenades. One landed right in front of Fr. Wong, and he thought that was the end. He prayed: "Lord, I don't want to die like this, shot in

a foreign land!" Wonder of wonders, the grenade did not explode.

As the soldiers neared the gate, they heard a female voice speaking in their language which Fr. Wong understood. She said: "Enough! Enough! Go home!" Immediately, the soldiers turned back, climbed into their trucks and left!

Next morning, Fr. Wong and the other priests brought fruits and food to the Ursuline Indonesian sisters who lived in the convent just before the Don Bosco Compound. They were sure it was the Mother Superior whose voice they heard telling the soldiers to depart.

Great was their surprise when Mother Superior told them, "No, that was not I who spoke those words. I was with the other sisters hiding inside the convent. We heard that the voice, too, and wondered who was the woman?"

At the end of that story, all of us had goose pimples and were teary eyed. We knew it was Our Blessed Mother who had intervened and saved the people. **Happy Birthday Mama Mary**

(Meily, Anita S. (2006). *And Life Goes On: Mary our Mother in Heaven*. Philippine Panorama: (October 15, 2006)

Missiology of Incarnation

Fr. Jesus Escala, SDB

(Taking advantage of the limited time for a business trip here in the Philippines and likewise to visit his family, Fr. Jess Escala takes time out and share with us his experiences and reflections as a missionary in Papua New Guinea giving us a glimpse of his work and life in a light banter.)

I initially felt my missionary calling when I was still in my secondary schooling in my teenage years. It was during that the time after an invitation of Fr. Jess Tayag that I joined a missionary club in Don Bosco Tondo to explore my aspiration for the missions. I only realized how strong the calling was when a week after I became a deacon that I approached Fr. Francis Gustilo to share with him my intention to become a missionary.

Everything can be compared like a whirlwind romance because as soon as I was ordained a priest in December 8, 2000, I immediately transferred to my first assignment after three months working as an Economist in Don Bosco Gabutu on March 22 of the same year. My administrative work was a result of the frequent assignments given to me during my post novitiate in Canlubang, Laguna.

I have always nurtured my missionary vocation despite of the many challenges that it brings. One of my guiding principles in life is *my conviction to continually immerse myself in the culture of the Papua New Guineans helping them in a level that we can reach and understand each other*. There are continuous trials during my stay pertaining to visible and expected changes that are not

forthcoming among the people I look after but I just consider these potential setbacks as part of work and part of life.

I believe that having this expectation is really difficult to handle inasmuch as any shift of paradigm does not happen once. I only come to thank God that I have been his unworthy instrument in his work for the young people here in PNG. I would not have lasted this long if not for God's grace and his constant prodding of giving me strength to stay on. *It is for this matter that people should remember to pray for missionaries so that we remain strong and faithful in our mission work.*

The reality of mission life will not be complete without the crises that also come our way. It is important that missionaries are able to find a support group to continue growing and likewise be effective in one's work in handling different missionary problems.

Despite of these realities which are both positive and negative, I am convinced that the missionary vocation given me is a gift. I may find little support but I firmly believe that it is God's work and I am only responding to his invitation.

I enjoy people who will pursue their missionary vocation to be convinced that it is a primarily a call to grow deeper in one's relationship with God. This immersion with the people I came to meet and love, the youth of Papua New Guinea, is what I sum up as the missiology of incarnation.

