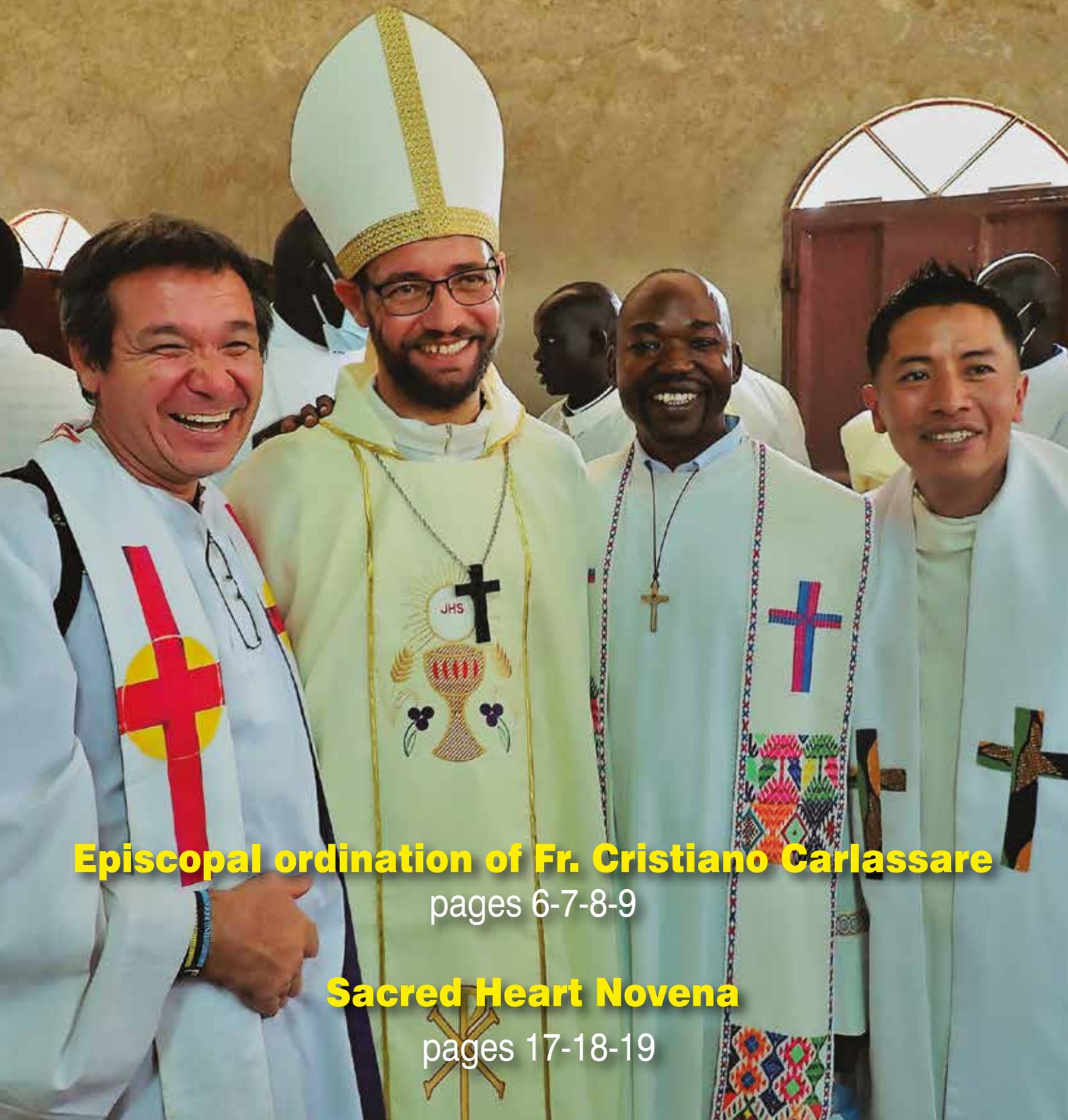


# COMBONI MISSION

*Summer 2022*



**Episcopal ordination of Fr. Cristiano Carlassare**

pages 6-7-8-9

**Sacred Heart Novena**

pages 17-18-19

# COMBONI MISSION

Summer 2022

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From the Editor



# Summertime

Our lead article relates the wonderful event of the Episcopal Ordination of Fr. Cristiano Carlassare. Surviving an attempt on his life, and seriously wounded, he returned to Italy last year to return again to South Sudan for his ordination. It is a story of great courage and commitment to the mission. I encourage you to read the reports on his ordination (pgs.6-9).

On a purely personal note, I am glad to report the celebration of my Golden Jubilee of the priesthood.

It was a joyful occasion and an opportunity to thank family, colleagues, friends and our benefactors for prayers and good wishes. It was all that, with the grace of God, that I made it to 50 years and maybe more to come?

This edition of 'Comboni Mission' appears in time to celebrate the Feast of our patron the Sacred Heart. I would like to thank Fr. Donal Neary SJ for offering us the Novena prepared by the 'Messenger' magazine in Dublin. May the Sacred Heart grant you all the graces you petition for.

A new feature in this edition is 'Youth

Corner'. It is above all a reminder to all of us to keep our youth in our thoughts and hopes to be bearers of the Good News in their own particular environments with their own particular gifts.

The year is halfway over and no doubt it hasn't all been easy for families. The rise in the cost of living, soaring energy bills, increase in Food Banks and the terrible suffering in Ukraine. We need lots of hope and courage to face the daily challenges that life throws at us!

Let's hope that summer will be really a sunny and cheerful moment for us all. If you are lucky to get a good break then grab it with both hands!



Fr. John

COMBONI MISSION ISBN 0962-7154 is a quarterly publication of the Comboni Missionaries (also known as the Verona Fathers), a Catholic Missionary Institute for the evangelisation of peoples, issued free to their friends and supporters.

Cover Photo: Comboni Press

Current issue: Summer 2022

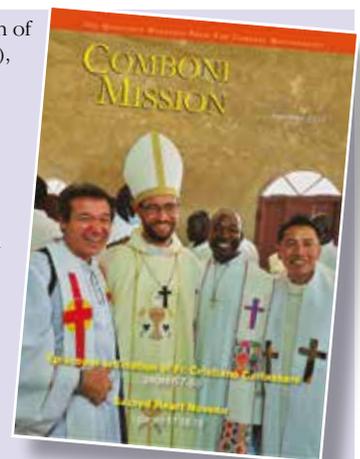
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Designed and Printed by Artworks, Dalkey, Co. Dublin.

Telephone: 00 353 1 275 1707.

Our thanks to contributors whose photographs and letters we have used.



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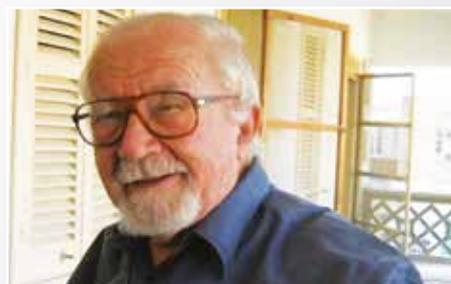
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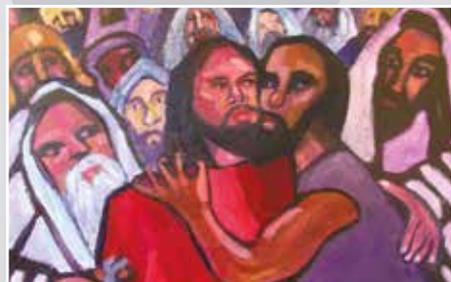
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# Getting to know the *Comboni* *Missionaries*

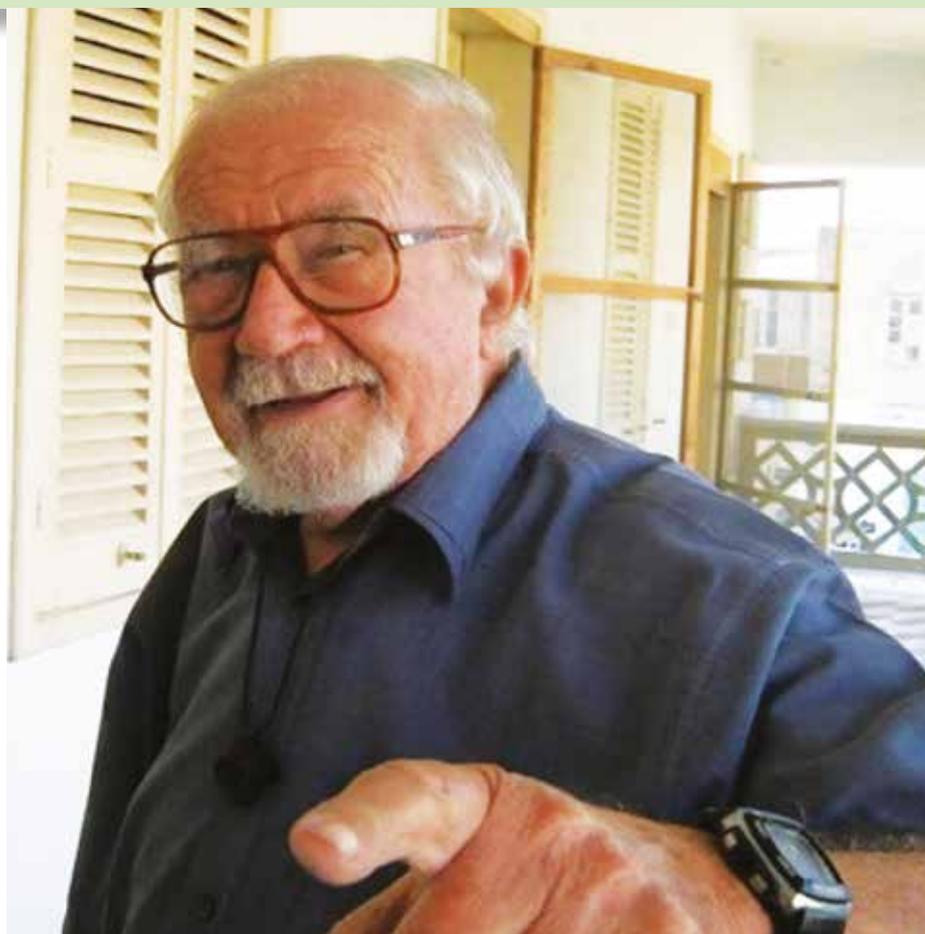


## Fr. Francesco Cazzaniga, a Comboni Missionary for the Sudanese people

**Thursday, March 17, 2022**

It pleased the Lord to call back his servant Father Francesco Cazzaniga on Saturday, 12 March 2022, after some heart complications that are not uncommon among those who suffer from diabetes like he did.

Fr. Cazzaniga is to be remembered as a Comboni Missionary for the Sudanese people; intelligent, humble, unpretentious, organized, deeply humane. Those who have known him have met in him a man at peace with all because he was at peace with himself.



### **His early life**

Francesco Cazzaniga was born on 30 March 1925 in Mariano Comense, in the Archdiocese of Milan, Italy. After some years in the diocesan seminary of Milan, he decided to join the Comboni Missionaries because he wanted to be a pastor of souls rather than end up teaching in the seminary. He professed the first vows in 1943 and the final vows five years later. In 1949 he was ordained priest and immediately assigned to the mission of the Sudan, which would be his province for the next 62 years.

After studying Arabic at the Colonial Course in London and then in Zahle, Lebanon for one year, he came to Khartoum, where he worked in CCK as a teacher from 1950 to 1965, with the interruption of two years (1957–1959) when he went back to London for a specialization in Religious Studies and one in Islamology.

### **Turns down appointment as bishop**

It was in 1965 that he was assigned to El Obeid, first of all to work in Comboni School El Obeid as director, then to help in the pastoral ministry in the parishes of Kadugli and the cathedral. From 1969 to 1975 he was the Apostolic Administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of El Obeid (prior to Fr. Paolino Lukudu, who would eventual-



*Sudanese children dance in celebration at Mass*

ly become the first bishop of El Obeid as a diocese). The story goes that he declined to be made bishop of El Obeid. Confreres remember he was not at ease with being in the spotlight, yet he carried on his duty to the best of his abilities. In the early 70's, he sponsored some young men from Kadugli to go to study in Nahoud; from that group of young men, some vocations to the priesthood trace their origin.

In 1975 Fr. Francesco was sent to Ethiopia to specialize in nursing sciences for the lepers. He thus spent two years in Awasa, in Sidamo (Ethiopia). When he came back, he carried

on his work in the parish of Kadugli while also reaching out to the people affected by leprosy, working alongside local health officers for the distribution of medicines.

Except for two more years in Holy Family Chapel in Khartoum (CCK), his mission would remain between El Obeid and Kadugli till 1993. He is remembered for his precious work in the formation of catechists in the Nuba mountains, and more so in areas where the Catholic presence needed to be strengthened.

In 1993 Fr. Francesco was assigned to Port Sudan. There he spent the remaining 18 years of his service in the

Sudan, mainly teaching CRE in the Secondary School and to students of public schools. Fr. Benito Buzzaccarin, who spent with him twelve years, recalls his precision and dedication in teaching, as well as his generosity in giving extra lesson to the Shahada Sudaniya candidates. He took special care in teaching CRE to Eritrean students as well, offering to them a special class. He is remembered very fondly both by former students and teachers, among whom he obtained great admiration.

### **Still teaching at 86 !**

Talking of his gentle character and few words, Fr. Benito says, "I have never heard him raise his voice". Younger confreres like Fr. Antonio Manganhe, appreciated a lot his wisdom and his tireless dedication to work despite his advanced age, as well as his availability in helping out young missionaries in polishing the Arabic of their Sunday homilies; in fact, he is remembered also for his good mastering of the language. Fr. Luigi Cignolini recalls that he taught up to the day he left Port Sudan, at the age of 86. His only health-related complaint towards the last times was that he had some difficulty in hearing; for this reason, he requested his students to put their questions in writing. While in Port Sudan, he raised funds for the "Comboni-Ba" schools, with the program "Adopt a school".

In 2011, he retired and went back to Italy, first in the community of Rebbio and then to Milano. It pleased the Lord to call back his servant on Saturday, 12 March 2022, after some heart complications that are not uncommon among those who suffer from diabetes as he did.

### **A priest to the end for the Sudanese people**

Fr. Francis Cazzaniga is to be remembered as a Comboni Missionary for the Sudanese people; intelligent, humble, unpretentious, organized, deeply humane. Those who have known him have met in him a man at peace with all because he was at peace with himself.



# SOUTH SUDAN

## Episcopal Ordination of Mons. Christian Carlassare In a beautiful and moving ceremony that lasted more than four hours

**M**ons. Christian Carlassare was consecrated Bishop of the diocese of Rumbek in South Sudan on 25 March 2022, the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord. The celebration was presided over by H.E. Card. Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Archbishop Emeritus of Khartoum (Sudan). In his homily, the cardinal said to the new bishop: “Your mission is the continuation of the mis-

sion of the apostles which today is the mission of the Church and which becomes your mission as a bishop ‘to make disciples of Jesus Christ’”. Immediately afterwards he thanked him for his return to Rumbek, despite the aggression suffered, and for having accepted to be bishop of the poor and to live among the poor. The celebration was attended by all the bishops of the Episcopal Conference

of Sudan and South Sudan, priests, men and women religious, lay representatives of all the parishes of the diocese of Rumbek, representatives of other dioceses and a delegation of priests and laity from Italy, including Fr. Fabio Baldan, provincial superior of Italy. Mons. Christian was accompanied by his mother Marcellina, his father Pierantonio and his sister Paola.



*Cristiano is ordained bishop by Cardinal Zubeir*



*The newly ordained bishop greets the people*

There was also a large group of Comboni Fathers and Comboni Sisters, including Superior General Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie, Sr. Maria Martinelli provincial superior of the Comboni sisters and Fr. Louis Okot, provincial superior of South Sudan. The ceremony was animated by five choirs and liturgical dance groups. After the ceremony, a lunch was offered and, in the afternoon, a show was performed, at the end of which Msgr. Carlassare received gifts from everyone.

The day before, 24 March, as bishop-elect, Mons. Carlassare had made the profession of faith and taken the oath of fidelity to the Pope and to the Church, in the presence of the Pope's representative, the Apostolic Nuncio Mons. Huber-

tus Matheus Maria van Megan, Papal Nuncio to Kenya and South Sudan. Bishop Christian recalled that March 24 is the Day of Missionary Martyrs who gave their lives in the service of the Gospel and the people of God and that it was very significant for him to make the profession of faith and take the oath on that day.

Mons. Carlassare returned to Rumbek on 23 March, eleven months after being attacked and wounded in the legs by gunshots, on 26 April 2021. With enormous joy, a large crowd of people gave him a hero's welcome at the airport. Lakes State Governor Rin Tueny Mabor welcomed him and thanked him for returning to Rumbek despite the attack he suffered and offered his full support. Mons. Carlassare, together with those

who came with him and accompanied by many Catholics, went in procession to the cathedral. People came out of their homes and shops to greet him and thank him for returning. In his message, Mons. Carlassare made an appeal for reconciliation and peace.

He asked people to repeat five times "we are all one in Christ", the motto and purpose of his episcopate: to unite all in Christ, as St. Paul says, "all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). He concluded by saying they should not look for him so much in the cathedral as in their communities where he will visit them, including the "cattle camps". Everyone in the diocese disapproved of the attack he suffered and offered him their solidarity, sympathy and total support.

by Fr. Gregor Schmidt mccj

# Consecration of the Italian Comboni Father Christian Carlassare as bishop of Rumbek, **SOUTH SUDAN**



Fr Gregor Schmidt worked closely with Cristiano for five years in the parish of Old Fangak. He presents us here with a further, personal, reflective and prayerful message regarding the ministry of the new Bishop and the challenges that lie ahead. We are asked to pray for the new Bishop and the people of his diocese.

On March 25, 2022, on the Feast of Annunciation, Fr. Christian was ordained bishop in Rumbek by the Cardinal Emeritus of Khartoum, Zubeir Wako. The rite began with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. A precious book with the four Gospels was placed on Christian's head. After being anointed with oil, he received a Mitra, a ring and a staff. The staff is hand-made from a tree of his home region in Italy, the diocese of Padova. It was a joyful feast with more than 10,000 visitors of the parishes. The authorities were represented by the governor of Lakes State and a minister from the national government. President Salva Kiir sent his greetings. Several guests from abroad attended the consecration, such as the parents and the sister of Christian, the General Superior of the Comboni Missionaries, Tesfaye Tadesse, and the Italian Provincial Fabio Baldan.

The day before his ordination, on the Memorial Day of St. Oscar Romero, Fr. Christian took the bishop's oath. He placed this oath, i.e., to be faithful to the Gospel and to serve the people of God as shepherd with all his strength, under the legacy of St. Oscar Romero who was murdered for his solidarity with the poor and those deprived of their rights. Christian himself was shot after his appointment and will carry the scars on his legs all his life. On the day of his consecration,

he returned for the first time to the room where the attack happened last year in April. His parents and a group of Comboni Missionaries accompanied him. We prayed arm in arm together in the room where the bullet holes are still seen, about 15 holes in the walls and the door. When the father of Christian attempted to say a prayer, his words became tears and we all had tears in our eyes. It was a blessed moment, being aware that God

had protected Christian to make the Gospel a light of hope in this country burdened through violence. We also remembered the words of Jesus that a true shepherd does not abandon his sheep in times of trouble, but will offer his life for them. Christian confessed to this when he shared in the mass on Sunday (March 27) that he never had doubts to return. The Catholics applauded spontaneously. The Gospel reading of this mass (the





*Fr Gregor (left of Bishop) with the new consecrated bishop and fellow Comboni missionaries*

4th Sunday of Lent) was the parable of the merciful Father with his two sons in Luke 15. Christian celebrated his first mass as a priest 18 years ago with the same Gospel. It is a parable for South Sudan where our heavenly Father yearns to unite tribes into one family of faith, where people have sinned like the younger son and where people don't want to forgive like the elder son. Christian wants to gather people and reconcile them through Christ to God. As a shepherd of the diocese his words and actions shall point to the self-giving of the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ and the love of the merciful heavenly Father. His motto as a bishop to bring the unity of faith is chosen from Galatians 3:28 "All of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Christian came to Sudan in 2005, the year of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the southern regions and the government in Khartoum. It paved the way for independence in 2011. For 10 years, he lived among the Nuer in Holy Trinity Parish, Fangak County, Malakal Diocese. I was sent there in 2012 and worked together with Christian

for almost 5 years. We spent a blessed and joyful time together which developed into friendship and deep trust. Christian lives his faith and his vocation as a missionary with sincere earnestness and love for humans. He draws his strength from his relationship with the Lord Jesus and focuses in his pastoral work to make people trust in Jesus and follow Him wholeheartedly. His earnestness prevents him from frittering away his time, instead he has been working diligently as a parish priest, as a formator in the Comboni province and in his position as general vicar of the Diocese of Malakal. At the same time, he has a healthy humor which pays attention to the unintentional comedy of human behavior. We laughed a lot in Old Fangak. Christian's humor does not show at the expense of others, but he makes people feel relaxed to laugh together.

South Sudan has seven dioceses. Christian is the only foreign bishop and currently the second Comboni bishop after Matthew Remijio in Wau. His appointment comes at a time where the split in society and in politics is deepening again.

Even Catholics and their bishops are affected. The visit of the pope to Juba in July 2022 gives us some hope. But the situation remains fragile. While we were celebrating in Rumbek, soldiers of the president were gathering near the airport and the house of the opposition leader who made an appeal to the international community. There is a risk that the country slides back to open civil war.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for the Church in South Sudan to have a unified response to a path of reconciliation for this multi-ethnic society. Therefore, I place my hope in the new bishop of Rumbek, who was a shepherd for the Nuer in previous years and now has become a shepherd for the Dinka, because he defends impartially the dignity, freedom and well-being of each human being. Our founder Daniel Comboni was not the first missionary in Sudan, but he was the first who returned. All other missionaries which survived their visit did not. May the return of Christian Carlasare be a sign that God will bring blessings and healing for the peoples of South Sudan.

# Together celebrating 50 years of priesthood



*Presentation of the Papal Blessing*

On Sunday 24th April, this year, the church community of Sacred Heart, Sunningdale gathered to share in the joyful anniversary of the ordination of Fr. John Downey. 50 years on and still going! A number of Comboni missionaries were present including the Superior Provincial, Fr. Albert Pelucchi. Fr. Martin Devenish preached a thoughtful and serious homily on priesthood and the call to ministry within the Universal Church. A Papal Blessing was presented to Fr. John at the Mass by his two sisters providing a very significant moment of the celebration. The Mass was conducted in a joyful spirit accompanied by the fine voiced choir and by the organ playing of Mar. Charles Pinsent. After Mass there was a presentation by the Church committee to Fr. John and a splendid Buffet lunch to complete a very memorable day!

Fr. John returned to his native parish at St. Columba's, Lanarkshire, Scotland where on the 1st. of May the memory of his ordination was relived 50 years on! Fr. John's family and relatives with many friends were present to join in giving thanks. Fr. John Clark preached a strong message on the role of the priest and congratulated Fr. John on his dedica-

tion and love of the mission. The Mass was beautifully sung and accompanied by good congregational singing! Following the Mass there was a large gathering in the parish hall and the cutting of a cake and toast raised in congratulations to Fr. John. Ad multos anos! (Many more years!)



*Family group in happy mood after the Mass*



**"I pray that all may be one" (Jn 17)**

## Pope Francis' Planned South Sudan Trip Shines Hope for Refugees

**Wednesday, April 6, 2022**

The number of refugees arriving in Uganda from neighboring South Sudan has risen in the past weeks, a Catholic Priest ministering in Uganda's Catholic Archdiocese of Gulu has said, and exuded confidence that the planned Papal visit to the East-Central African country will ignite hope in the displaced people. In a message shared with ACI Africa, Fr. Lazar Arasu who, for the last five years, has been involved in pastoral ministry at Don Bosco Palabek Refugee Services, decried the silence on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ugandan refugee camps and said that the Holy Father's visit to South Sudan would restore stability in the country. **"It is everyone's hope that the eagerly awaited visit of the Pope in July will bring the long-awaited peace and stability to South Sudan," Fr. Arasu says in the Monday, March 28 message.**

Fr. Lazar Arasu

The Indian-born member of the Religious Institute of the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) who serves as the Chaplain for the refugees in the Archdiocese of Gulu highlights the case of 24-year-old Michael Diew, who had



*Fr. Lazar Arasu, the Director of Don Bosco Palabek Refugee Services with Pope Francis in Rome.*

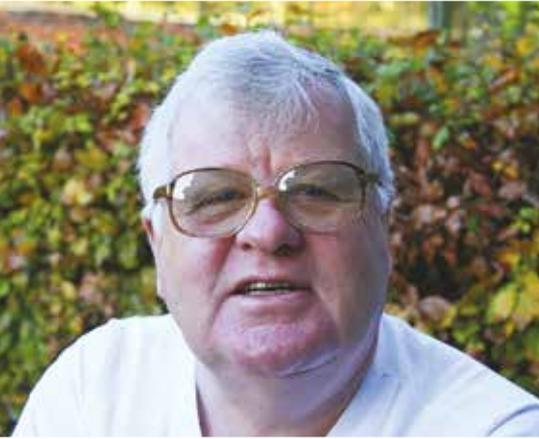
trekked for a long time from Bentiu State in Northern South Sudan and arrived at Palabek Refugee Settlement Camp in Northern Uganda. He says, in reference to Michael, "He looked exhausted after many days of tedious journey from Bentiu state focused on reaching a refugee camp in Uganda. His exodus first took him to Juba, the capital of South Sudan and later to Palabek via Nimule, the border post between South Sudan and Uganda."

The journey from South Sudan to Uganda consists of walking long distanc-

es, taking dangerous canoe rides on the Nile and finally standing in an open truck for several hours at night, Fr. Arasu says. Refugees who have arrived in Uganda report that several IDP camps in South Sudan such as Mangateen were closed due to lack of food supply from World Food Programme, government's policy of enforcing people to their home areas and camps becoming more and more unsafe and conditions becoming inhumane, Fr. Arasu says.

*Continued on page 16*

# The Sacred Heart And Broken Hearts In War



Fr J. Clark mccj



*The compassionate heart of Christ*

**A**ny heart that is compassionate feels and is moved to tears at the sight of suffering. Human behaviour can contribute significantly to many forms of human suffering especially in war. Trying to make sense of the senselessness of human suffering in wartime is no easy matter. Many people just do not have the heart to look the many forms of war-violence in the face.

The heart: what it's all about? The heart can be the place where we discover what we are deeply searching for and discover our true desires. It can reveal our authentic values, even the very store of our inward treasures and secrets, and basically how we love. Sometimes the heart can see what is blind to the physical eye. I think it must have taken the disciples ages to understand the mind and heart of Christ and make them their own.

We behold the horrible rubble of war, so ugly shown on television news broadcasts. Violent conflicts with war or without war account for millions of deaths, untold thousands of lives with consequences such as long-term injury, amputation, tremendous emotional mental health problems and the global move-

ment of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons. We can see and hear weeping and wailing in so many places. War, indeed, does swamp the heart.

War simply breeds war. What is learned from force or violence are force and violence themselves. It is time to make war on war. War does not work anymore. It is not a question who wins the war but who wins the peace. To win a war but keep an enemy does not promote peace. On violence is one of the most powerful weapons in the world. Mahatma Ghandi and others like the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King Jr have taught us that it can be practised everywhere by everybody, in our hearts, in our families, among our friends, in our country, across the planet.

Our testimony for peace has never been more needed than today. We need

to allow God's spirit to speak to our hearts. Jesus Himself never killed anybody. He Himself was killed. Jesus in His heart of hearts knew violence could never win out, but only the love and peace present in one's heart. People who follow Christ are people with loving peaceful hearts. Christ wants us to be instruments of peace and not through war to tear down and destroy life.

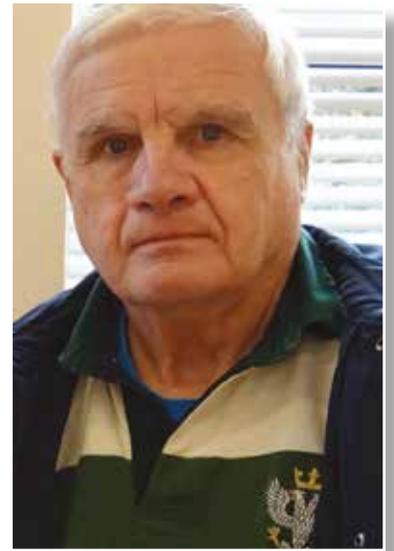
Jesus was born of Mary to reveal the heart of God. From Jesus' broken heart there came out blood and water Jn. 19,33-34. It is not beyond me to think Jesus must have cried for the ten lepers. He could read their hearts; what is more He was able to enter into the deep anguish of the human heart. Above all, He revealed the heart of God His Father, a heart that brims over with love that outshines the violence of any war.

**HEART OF JESUS, HEART OF GOD.**

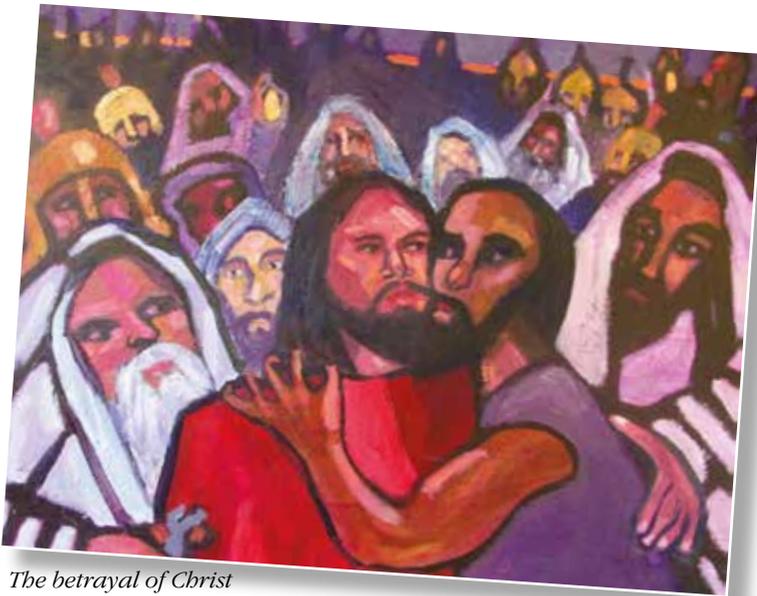
By Harvey Martin

# Evangelising through Art

Our resident poet, artist, story-teller, Harvey Martin, sends us news of a recent art exhibition of his works held at the Art Centre, Windsor. It is part of his ministry of bringing the Good News into the market place!

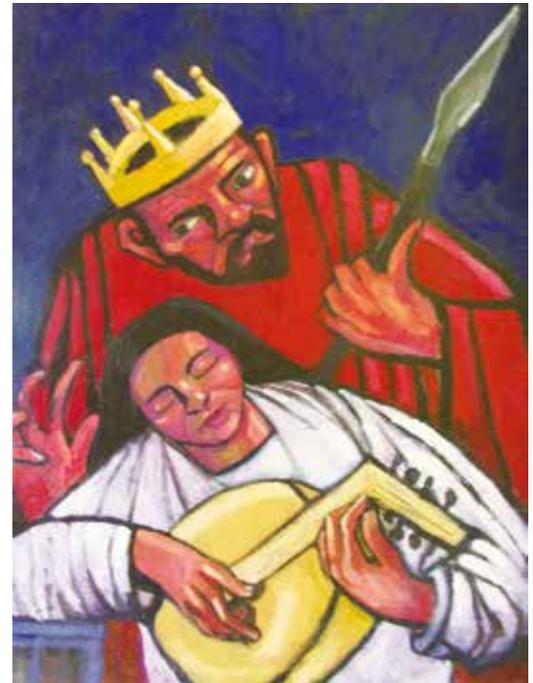


Harvey Martin

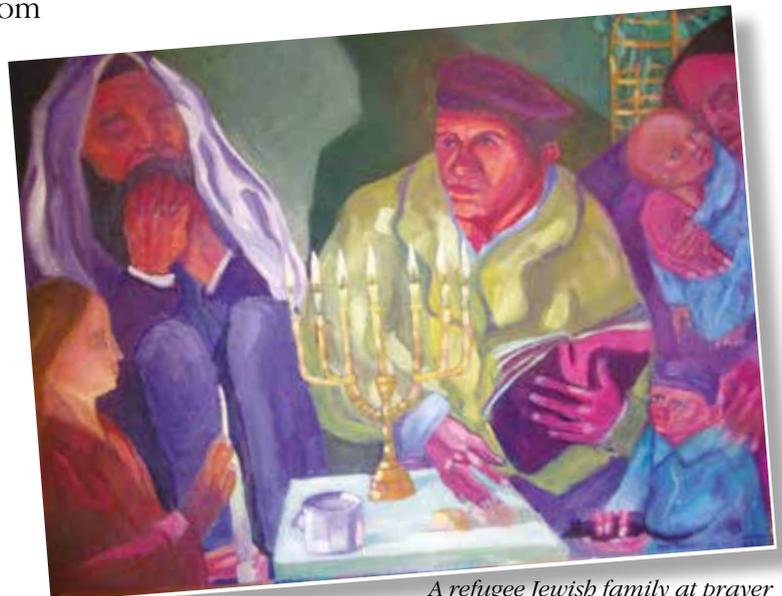


*The betrayal of Christ*

In February this year I was invited to show my paintings at The Old Court Art Centre in Windsor. It was a lovely space, taking in the entrance area and the bar. Quite a few people came on the opening night, including someone I asked directions from the week before in London. She purchased a painting and a charcoal drawing! Friends came from the church and we had a good time socialising and I gave them a personal tour of the Exhibition. I had four paintings on show that were based on my faith. One was the betrayal of Christ. I actually sold one that depicted David's struggle with King Saul who was very jealous of David's increasing popularity. It was a successful time. I sold 5 paintings and the manager has offered me another place in the future. The largest painting in the exhibition concerned a Jewish family praying whilst hiding in the sewers of Warsaw during the Nazi occupation of Poland.



*David and King Saul*



*A refugee Jewish family at prayer*



# A year of grace and gratitude

**'Celebrating 150 years lived in the footsteps of our Founder, St Daniel Comboni.'**

**T**he Comboni Missionary Sisters celebrate the 150th year since their foundation. A year to recall the original vision received from the legacy of St. Daniel Comboni

This year, 2022, is a Jubilee Year for us Comboni Missionary Sisters spread out in many countries of the world. Indeed, a time of great rejoicing for the gift of 150 years lived in the footsteps of our Founder, St Daniel Comboni, across Continents, Cultures and Communities.

A Jubilee Year has in itself the potential to create a significant impact on anyone who recognizes the importance of holistic transformation in any given reality. The young apostolic missionary Daniel Comboni had envisaged this process as foundational for the immense Vicariate of Central Africa to reach the fullness of life, both at the ecclesial and societal level. This is what

we, as Comboni Missionary Sisters, are also aiming at during the course of this Jubilee Year. There are many ideas, initiatives and events programmed at the various Congregational levels. Through these few lines, I would like to share some perceptions about the significance of our journey.

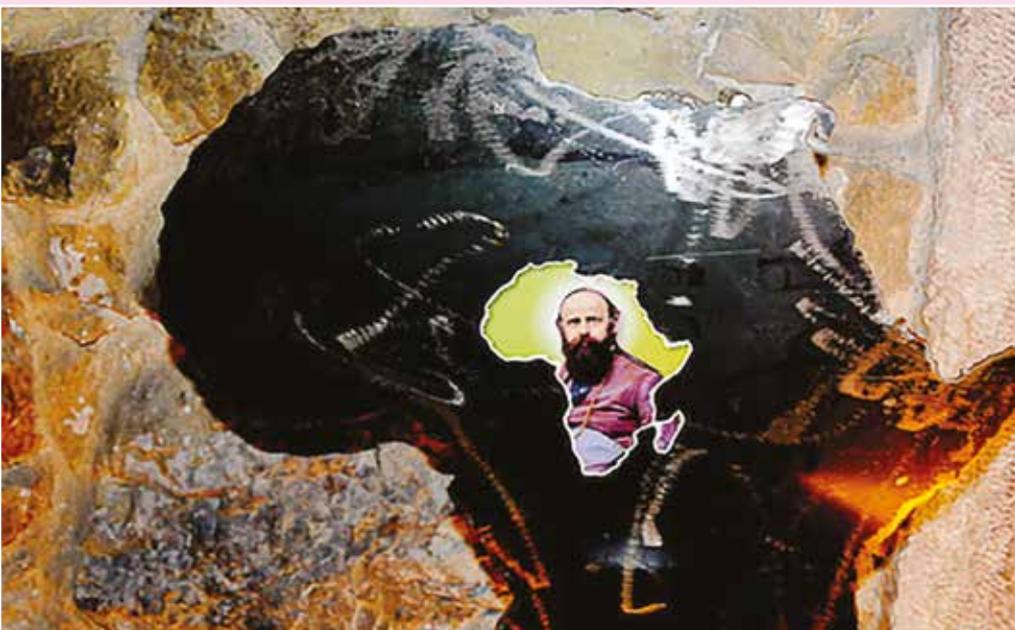
The Missionary Movement of the 19th Century had brought new vigour to the Catholic Church in Europe, and many religious missionary groups started in different European countries with the aim of sharing the Good News of the Gospel with people still unfamiliar with the life of Jesus.

Born on 15th March 1831, on the shores of Lake Garda, in Northern Italy, into a family which knew unity, necessity and limitations, Daniel grew with the desire to aim at greater-than-reality horizons. The encounter, in 1843, with Fa-

ther Nicola Mazza, a priest in the Diocese of Verona, a holy and intelligent man, capable of positively influencing the course of history for the impoverished masses of his time, marked forever the heart and mind of young Daniel.

Comboni was a young priest when, at the end of 1857, he first travelled to the Sudan. Son, as he was, of the society and of the church of his time, he brought along the journey of his first encounter with Africa a tremendous desire to share with the mother of Humanity Continent all that had shaped his religious and social worldview. Faith and family, tradition and education, history and culture intermingled with the political, ecclesial and cultural backstage characterizing the 19th Century and in which Daniel learned to give his unique contribution.

With the enthusiasm that sustains the



*Africa or Death !*

efforts of pioneers along the unknown paths of discovery, Daniel understood that his vocation to missionary life led him to the immense Vicariate of Central Africa. “Africa or Death” became his motto, and, for the realization of his dream Daniel lived and spent his entire life.

Whenever I search for hints regarding what was so unique about Comboni’s missionary experience, I cannot but come up with the certainty that he was caught up in the same unique experience felt by Moses in front of the burning bush. Just as Moses fell right into the

embrace of the engaging love that Yahweh had for the suffering people of Israel, the same happened for this new Moses in the heart of Africa.

Again, the same words: “I have heard the cry of my people... I am sending you to them. Go!”

What a fortunate man Comboni was! And what a powerful experience he was granted: that of falling right into the loving embrace that God was sharing with suffering Africa! It is in this very experience that the mystical dimension of his vocation found its roots. Once he perceived that the heart of God was

suffering for the pain the people suffered, then there could be no obstacle for this courageous missionary to say yes to God and to Africa forever.

Daniel Comboni invested all his human capacity to bring about the mission God had entrusted to him. Tirelessly he travelled, wrote, defended, supported, and fostered the cause of the Black Pearl to shine in the Crown of the Church! Strongly believing that the Hour of Africa had finally dawned not only on the Continent but also for the entire world to see, he saw as imperative the presence of consecrated women for the fulfilment of this endeavour.

On 1 January 1872, in Verona, Daniel Comboni officially founded our community. He was not new at working with religious women. In fact, for some twelve years, the Congregation of the sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, whom he had first met in the Holy Land, sustained his missionary vision both in Egypt and in the Sudan. Much earlier on, in Verona, he had learned from the group of young African women teachers living at the Mazza’s institute the essential role that women would play in the evangelizing endeavour of the Church.

When the situation forced him to become a founder, Comboni named us Pie Madri della Nigrizia (Pious Mothers of Africa). Wow, what a presentation card! Immediately, the ‘mystery of pietas’ – about which even the apostle Paul wrote in his First Letter to Timothy (3:16) – made a clear demarcation line for our missionary identity to unfold. Yes, we were to be those mothers filled with the very pietas that poured out from the heart of God towards the millions of sons and daughters of Africa! Inside and outside the Continent!

150 years have gone by since the founding days. The seeds and roots of the beginnings have grown into a tree. From the small group of five, whom he first travelled with from Italy to Egypt, to something over a thousand, living today in 145 multicultural and multigenerational communities, the Pie Madri della Nigrizia – now more known as Comboni Missionary Sisters – continue striving to witness God’s mercy-full presence in a world that keeps marginalizing and impoverishing people. To remind everyone that God always hears their cry, and always comes to their rescue.



*Comboni Sisters witnessing God’s mercy-full presence*

*Continued from page 11*



*"I pray that all may be one" (Jn 17)*

Young refugees have also confided in the Salesian Priest that the sight of armed soldiers makes them doubt if they are government soldiers who can protect them or rebels who can rob them of what little they have or abduct them into fighting forces. The SDB member reports that such lack of trust has forced the vulnerable people to leave their country in search of safety elsewhere. "In the past weeks, people have also urgently left for Uganda due to floods that have ravaged most parts of the middle and northern side of South Sudan," he says.

South Sudan, the world's newest country, which gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, has been in civil war since December 2013. In his message shared with ACI Africa, Fr. Arasu says that South Sudan is divided on tribal lines and that the national army, the Su-

dan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is fragmented into several warring factions: one loyal to the state, another called SPLA 'In Opposition' (IO), which is loyal to the factional leader and one of the Vice Presidents, Dr. Riek Machar.

He says that besides the known political factions in South Sudan, there are many other war-lords who terrorize the innocent civilians in different areas of the country. The Catholic Priest says that the government is either unable to unite factions or is "unwilling to put order in the army and the state."

"But we cannot also forget the unhelpful interference of the foreign nations who sustain the war on oil and mineral interests," he says, and adds, "There are long lists of rich nations with middle-men from the neighbouring countries who are the undeniable perpetrators of war."

The Indian Salesian Priest who has been ministering in East Africa for more than two decades says that the war situation in South Sudan made it impossible for civilians to cultivate their food for years. Others, he says, have been forced to look for schools to enrol their children in Uganda, a country that is also experiencing challenges in its education sector. Unfortunately, he adds, "after COVID-19, schools in Uganda go through enormous difficulties even for their own citizens."

**By Agnes Aineah – ACI Africa**

Fr. Arasu predicts that due to the ongoing instability in South Sudan and continuous movements across the border as well as population growth, the arrival of new refugees from South Sudan is "expected to increase by 811,000 persons by the end of 2022."

"Aid agencies such as Don Bosco Missionaries witness that in the last three weeks alone at least 800 new refugees have arrived in Palabek Refugee Settlement in Lamwo district, which borders the South Sudan Eastern Equatoria state," he says. According to the SDB Priest, all the new arrivals are temporarily accommodated at the entrance of the settlement commonly called "Reception Centre", which he says is at the moment filled to the brim.

"The shelter sheds are full to capacity and refugees have taken shelter under the roadside trees. Indeed, it is a pathetic sight!" he says. Fr. Arasu says that refugees arriving in Uganda are also spending months before they get the assistance they require to settle down in the East African country. "It is a norm that when the new refugees arrive, within 15 days they ought to be registered with UNHCR and Office of the Prime Minister, the designated government body responsible for the care of refugees in Uganda and be taken to the plot of land," the Salesian Priest recounts in his message shared with ACI Africa March 28.

He adds, "It is also mandated that they (refugees) be given a Start Up Kit consisting of a large tarpaulin, a few pieces of wooden tree poles, and a few meters of ropes to make a shelter; and other items such as a set of utensils, blankets and a few other household items are given."

"It is not always easy for the responsible organizations/agents to provide these items on time. And many other logistics often make the refugees stay in the waiting shelters even for months," Fr. Arasu says. He describes South Sudan as "an oil and mineral rich nation (that) has one of the world's longest histories of war and conflict."

"The neglected refugees only remind us that the rich nations have given into donor fatigue. But the fact is refugees who are often the most vulnerable people on earth are being neglected and pushed to greater misery," the Salesian Priest says in his message shared with ACI Africa March 28.



*Fr. Arasu*

# Sacred Heart Novena 2022

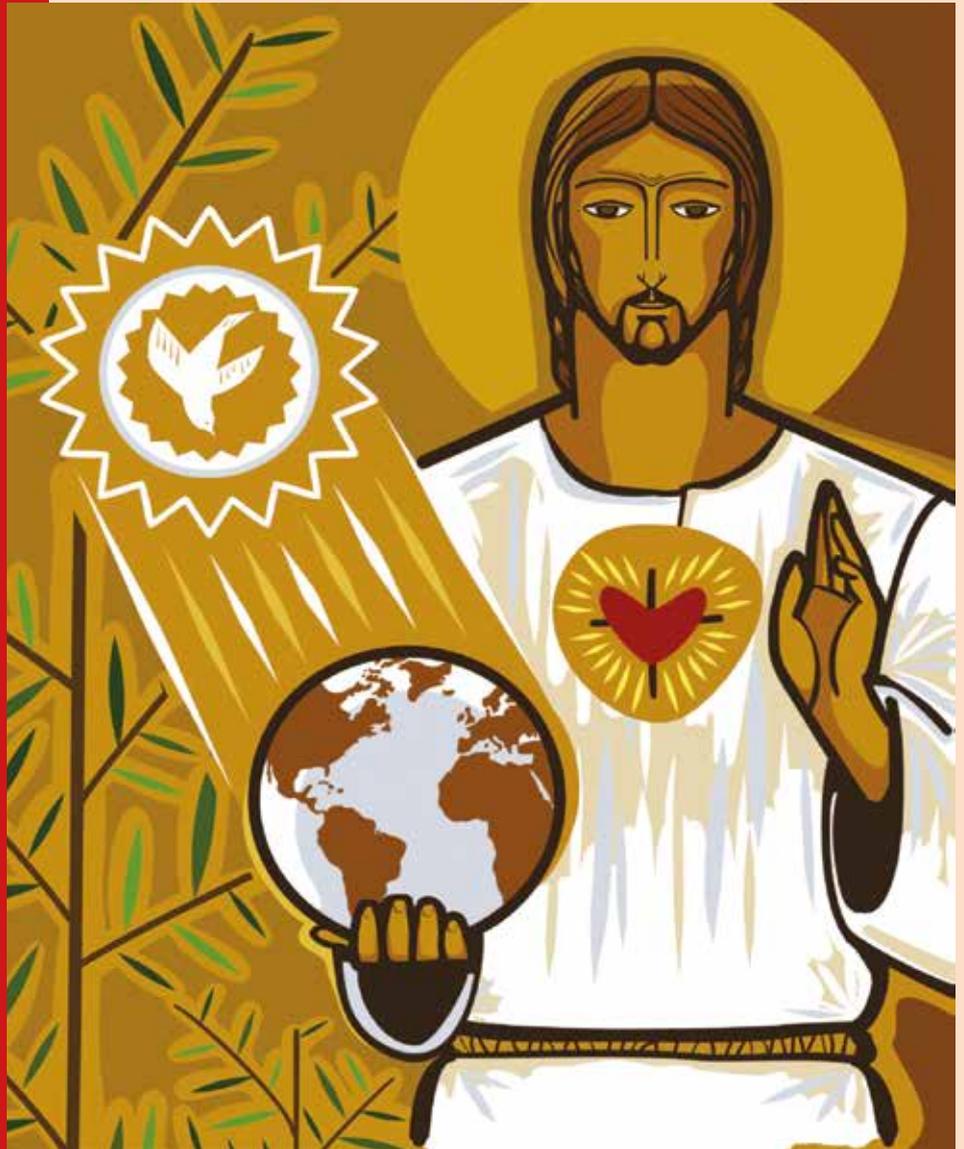
## Introduction

Among my earliest memories is a picture of the Sacred Heart, with its little red light, that was in our kitchen at home when I was growing up. I can well remember standing in front of that picture and being totally absorbed by it. Without any words, it assured me that our family was safe and secure because we were wrapped in the love of Jesus that never fails.

We don't see that picture so often in our homes these days. Still, we need to find ways of reminding ourselves of the truth that image conveys: that we are all in the loving embrace of God, a love that is stronger than anything that might threaten us. The novena below is a chance to be reminded once again of that truth. You probably won't learn much that is new in these short pieces. You've heard it before, I'm sure, many times. But maybe you will come to a deeper realisation of how much God loves you and how secure you are in his love, and that would be a great thing.

This novena is for the nine days leading to the Feast of the Sacred Heart, which falls this year on 24 June. You may pray the novena privately, in your family, in a parish group or with your neighbours or friends. If you are praying it with others, a different person may lead the novena each day, or you may share the various sections among those taking part.

Don't rush. Read the Scripture passage and the meditation slowly, pausing when something strikes you. A short prayer follows, which takes up the theme of the day, and you end with the novena prayer on the following page.



## How to Pray This Novena

Set aside about ten minutes each day.

Take your time over the words you read. Linger over a word or a phrase. Repeat it aloud or in silence. Let it rest in your mind and heart. Think about its meaning.

Share your thoughts and feelings with Jesus. Wait quietly to see what

comes into your mind and heart.

Don't worry if nothing seems to be happening. People who know each other well don't need many words.

Blessed John Sullivan tells us that God is delighted to see us, even if we don't know what to say. God has our best interests at heart.

## Novena Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your heart was moved with love for those who came for help in their need. You healed the sick. You fed the hungry. You forgave sinners. You cried over Jerusalem. Above all, you showed to those who were prepared to listen the way to true life, for you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Lord, your heart is still moved today by your people and their many needs. Open my heart to hear your word, to accept your love, and to respond to your call. In particular, I beg you to grant me the favour I ask during this novena (make your request silently), provided that it will contribute to my own eternal good and to the building up of your kingdom of love, peace and justice here on earth.

*Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,  
I place all my trust in you.*



### First Day (16 June)

#### A Heart that Attracts

**Scripture:** Jesus withdrew with the disciples to the lakeside, and great crowds from Galilee followed him. (Mk.3:7-9)

**Meditation:** Huge crowds sought out Jesus. What was it that attracted them? Some hoped that he would heal them of some illness or affliction. Others hoped that his consoling message of love would calm their troubled spirits. Others were drawn by the force of his personality. What is it about Jesus that attracts you?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, great crowds were attracted to you. Something about you made them want to be with you. Help me always to

experience that attraction and to find you in every situation.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



### Second Day (17 June)

#### A Heart that Welcomes

**Scripture:** Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Mk 10:14-16)

**Meditation:** The disciples tried to stop the little children coming to Jesus. Jesus had different ideas, however. Nobody was insignificant in his eyes. Children were as important to him as the most learned adult. Everybody was welcome in his presence to be embraced in his love and receive his blessing.

**Prayer:** Jesus, I know that you have a warm welcome for everyone. You want to meet me as I am, warts and all. So, here I am, Lord. It's good to be here.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



### Third Day (18 June)

#### A Heart that Forgives

**Scripture:** Forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. (Col 3:13)

**Meditation:** Most of us have experienced the pain of falling out with someone we have loved and trusted. Jesus reveals to us a God who harbours no resentment for our offences and whose greatest joy is in forgiving us. If that is how God acts towards us, can we act otherwise?

**Prayer:** Loving Jesus, you came among us to remove the barriers that lead us away from you. Teach me to forgive others in the same open-hearted way you forgive me.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



### Fourth Day (19 June)

#### An Ever-Present Heart

**Scripture:** And he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith?' ... and there was a great calm. (Mt 8:24-26)

**Meditation:** We have all experienced storms in our lives. We can feel swamped by worries of one kind or another. Where is Jesus, we wonder. Does he care? Yes, he does. Even if he appears to be asleep, he is still with us and will bring us to a place of calm.

**Prayer:** Lord, sometimes it can be hard to find you. There are times when you seem to be asleep. Lord, help me to believe deeply that you are never absent, that every storm will pass.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



## Fifth Day (20 June)

### A Prayerful Heart

**Scripture:** In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. (Mk 1:35)

**Meditation:** Jesus' life was punctuated with prayer. No matter how busy he was, Jesus found time to be alone with God – to reflect, to express his hopes and fears, to hear the Father's voice. This prayer was the source of Jesus' strength. In it we find strength too.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you sought out places to be alone with your Father. Help me to find an opportunity each day to spend even a short time in the Father's presence.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



## Sixth Day (21 June)

### A Heart for Service

**Scripture:** If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all. (Mk 9:35)

**Meditation:** Greatness for Jesus does not consist in wealth, power, status or success, but in service. Service of others is the measure of greatness in the kingdom of heaven. He spent his life serving others, not seeking his own glory and honour. We are most like him when we do the same.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you came among us as one who serves. Help me to live with your values and in imitation of your life.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



## Seventh Day (22 June)

### A Generous Heart

**Scripture:** If you then, imperfect as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Mt 7:11)

**Meditation:** Giving is a powerful sign of our love for another person. People who are deeply in love want to share what they have with each other. Love inspires generosity. God has given us everything we have. His generosity is limited only by our reluctance to receive.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, teach me to be grateful for all the good things I have received from you, and to imitate you in being generous in sharing them with others.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



## Eighth Day (23 June)

### A Broken Heart

**Scripture:** ... one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. (Jn 19:33–34)

**Meditation:** Jesus' crucifixion reveals to us the depths of evil which lurk in the human heart. But God transforms this scene into one of hope and love. From Jesus' broken heart there came out blood and water: image of the new life that flows from his death.

**Prayer:** Help me, Lord, to place my trust in the gift of life that flows from your wounded heart.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*



## Ninth Day (24 June)

### A Victorious Heart Feast of the Sacred Heart

**Scripture:** I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said he would. (Mt 28:5–6)

**Meditation:** We celebrate the victory of Jesus over sin and death, and over all that would demean us. His victory was won not by the exercise of power or the force of arms, but by a love that was faithful to the end. We best celebrate this great feast by committing ourselves to follow him on the road he travelled.

**Prayer:** Sacred Heart of Jesus, I ask you to deepen in me the graces of this novena. Show me how to pass on to others the consolation you so generously offer me.

*Finish with the Novena Prayer*

This Novena is taken from  
The Sacred Heart Messenger,  
June 2022  
The Novena begins on  
Thursday 16 June and ends on  
Friday 24 June

# 'LECTIO DIVINA'

Introduction: this Year the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus falls on the 24th of June 2022 and the Gospel given for that day is Luke 15:3-7, "the Lost sheep". Since we don't find a text in the scriptures that speaks specifically of the image of Sacred Heart, we can only find texts that expresses its meaning in every page which is the symbol of God's incarnate love, a love of a good shepherd, made tangible by the Incarnation of Jesus.



**1. Read:** read the text of Luke 15:3-7 slowly and listen attentively with the 'ear of your heart'. What word, sentence or phrase stands out for you? [spend 2 min of silence]

**2. Reflect:** read the text again and pay attention of what touches you; why is it meaningful for you.

What thought or reflection comes to you. [spend 2 min of silence]

**3. Respond:** read the text again but this time respond spontaneously to the word of God. In other words, make a dialogue with God what comes from within you. What gift does this text lead you to ask for from the Lord? [spend 2 min of silence]

**4. Stay with the Word:** read the text a final time and rest in the word. Allow God to speak to you in deep silence. Do not say anything just listen to God's words. What is He saying? [spend 5 min of silence]

**5. Take now the word, sentence, or phrase, into your daily life/activity;** allow it to become part of you. Always listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it and rest on it as time allows during the day. Then allow the Word leads you to action.

*Conclude your 'Lectio Divina' with the 'Our Father'...*

**Reflection:** No long ago we celebrated Holy Week the passion, death, and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus. These celebrations proved what Jesus told his disciples that *"the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11) and that he does it "as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28).* He has given up his life for all out of love, love that comes from his pierce heart which is the source of God's love for us. The solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus invites us to reflect on the humanness of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God who brought and showed to all humanity the love that springs from the Heart of his Father.

**Central Message:** *"Who among you...losing one of them...will not seek the lost one till he finds it?". "Celebrate with me, for I have found my lost sheep! There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine decent people who have no need of repentance"*

## Main points:

a) ***“Will seek the lost one till he finds it”.***

The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus this year will make emphasis on the love of the good shepherd who is ready to even bleed to rescue his lost sheep. This is God who became man in the person of Jesus who loves humanity and who has no regrets to have created them, because he loves them. In the book of Deuteronomy, we find the remarkable words of Moses spoken to his people: *“if God set his heart on you and chose you... it was because you were the least peoples. It was for love of you”* (cf. Dt 7:6-11). His words are not only the reminder of God’s covenant made with Abraham but a reflection of Jesus death on the Cross who laid down his life for us insignificant ones. His death was the proof of how much he loved us *“one can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends”* (Jn 15:13). Through his death then, he brought the sinner, the lost sheep to himself, he rescued them and brought them to the heart of the Father. The repentant thief who was crucified next to Jesus on the Cross said to him, *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom”*, and Jesus replied *“I promise you today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Lk 23:42-43). Sinners then are at the heart of Jesus, and up to now his heart keeps beating for them because he Loves them, but he wants them to respond to his love in the same

way repenting and come back to him *“I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance”* (Lk 5:32). Notice then that every sin that we commit his heart is wounded and bleeding because his love for us overflows from his heart. Therefore, this feast day reminds us that Jesus gave us the ultimate example of love, to lay down one’s life for another.

b) ***“There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner” than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance”.***

This text teaches us more about the heart of God than a whole library full of theological thesis. He has a big heart who cares about each one of us, even if we take the wrong turns and go astray, he still loves us deeply and will not rest until he finds us. When we hear the voice of his Son calling us and we answer in return amending and correcting our way of life, there will be a great rejoice in the halls heaven and the first one to rejoice for our return is God. How assuring are these words of Jesus, he really is a good shepherd rejoicing for the one he rescues and brings it near to his heart as it is well described in the book of Isiah *“the shepherd gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart* (Is 40:11). He wants our heart to beat at one with his and make it similar so that we can live in his compassionate love. Therefore, we believe and

take for certain that a sinner who repents and returns to God causes great rejoice in heaven and in the heart of God. God makes a feast for us when we astray and lost his way but found again to live in his love which never left us. The sacrament of reconciliation is a home coming, it’s a celebration of God’s welcoming our return, giving us his embrace of his loving mercy.

Some questions for our reflexion:

1. How would you like to consider yourself a sinner, or a righteous person?
2. How was your experience of turning away from God?
3. How was your experience returning to God’s love?
4. Does our heart beat at one with the Heart of Jesus?

## Some questions to help in our reflection

1. How would you approach Jesus’ suffering his passion and death?
2. Are you ready to take Jesus’ way?

“**Lectio Divina**”, a Latin term, means “divine reading” and describes a way of reading the Scriptures. Open ourselves to what God wants to say to us.



Any Questions? Keep in touch!

Contact me at:  
**ruben@comboniyouth.org**  
Father Rubén Padilla Rocha

# The Youth Corner:

## Vocation – A Gift to Our Humanity

Vocation is a gift to humanity and a guarantee of humanization for every human being. It is addressed to all and it is liberating, not reducing, human existence.

For a long time, vocation was understood as a specific mission that only a few can have – an elite of saints

who received a special call and whose inherent holiness allowed them to respond affirmatively to the call. However, we know that vocation is not limited to a certain path of life or to a certain kind of people. Vocation, as a gift from God, is human!

Vocation is a gift to humanity and is a guarantee of humanization for every human being. Only in this way can the breadth of vocation be liberating, not

reducing, human existence itself. The vocation is not directed to an elite, but to all, and if one wishes to find a common denominator to the whole vocation with its plurality of paths, we find God Himself and the indelible characteristic that the vocation always exists for the common good.

In fact, vocation is not in harmony with self-centeredness, but includes the dimensions of service, love of God and love of all humanity.

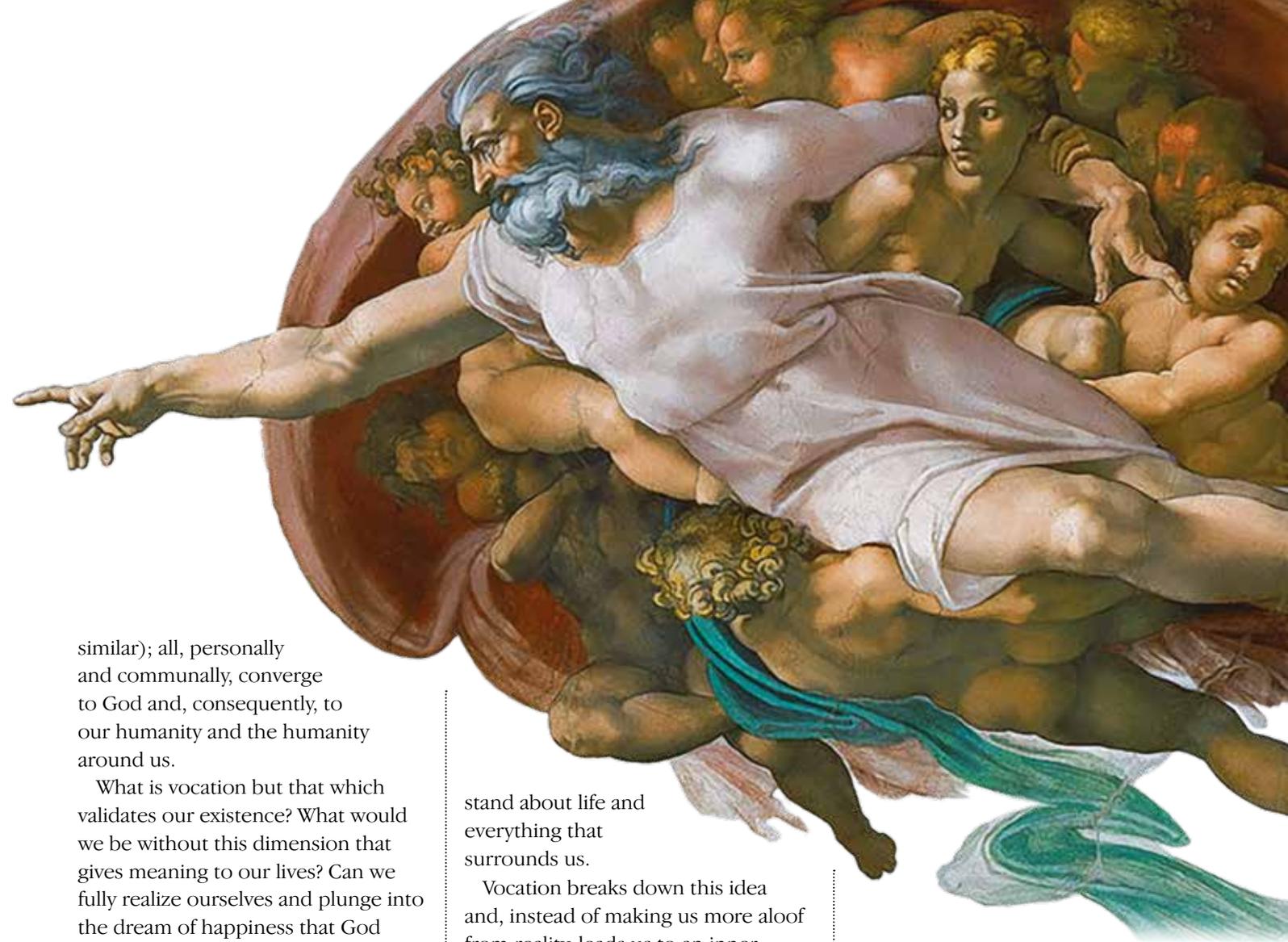
If we think about it, Jesus, throughout His earthly life, called everyone to Him, but also respected what each one was.

Following His call, we see the young, the old, children, men, and women in relationship with Him, regardless of their status (rich, poor, single, married, temple-bound, pagan, etc.).

The specific gift of one's vocation found its climax in the encounter with God and in the concrete life in the service of humanity (Matthew 22, 37-39). Today, vocational dynamism is governed by the same principle and there are no equal vocations

(although some vocations are





similar); all, personally and communally, converge to God and, consequently, to our humanity and the humanity around us.

What is vocation but that which validates our existence? What would we be without this dimension that gives meaning to our lives? Can we fully realize ourselves and plunge into the dream of happiness that God calls us to on our own?

Without the discernment and experience of the gift of vocation, we are like drifting boats on the high seas. We are lost, not knowing where we are or where we are going. Little by little, we no longer know who we are.

The vocation authenticates the human being as a person who seeks and fulfils himself at different times in life. This authenticity, however, does not come from a specific path that is taken. Rather, it takes place following the essence of every vocation.

Many times, we are led to think that vocation will transform us into something we are not: a kind of angel or saint who is alienated from the reality that surrounds us and away from those we love most. However, what happens is precisely the opposite. In fact, without realizing it, we are growing, living and gaining a certain propensity to consider ourselves better than others, to develop the conviction that we are right in what we say, and in where we

stand about life and everything that surrounds us.

Vocation breaks down this idea and, instead of making us more aloof from reality, leads us to an inner descent, making us more human and, consequently, better able to hear and meet our brother/sister.

This humanization also leads to a repositioning of the relationship with God that is a new configuration of the relationship itself, in which what prevails is no longer God who has to submit to our individual wills, but rather the desire, with Him, to better realize one's existence in the service of humanity.

We cannot be mistaken and pursue a vocation that "comes from without," which is in some way virtualized and therefore unreachable. We cannot continue to believe that it is reserved for only a few, or that the vocation we think we are called to live with is a smaller vocation compared to others.

If the vocation was something abstract or transcendent, no human being could discern it, live it or love it. For this reason, the vocation is full of humanity in its fullness, thereby allowing the action and magnificence

of God to manifest itself. When we ask, "How did God accomplish His saving mission?", we arrive at this answer: through incarnation. Through His Humanization He was able to redeem all mankind, even freeing them from the slavery of death.

It is in the human heart that the divine happens. This is where vocation has the space to be received, discerned and lived. To deny the inherent humanity of vocation is to deny the very possibility of its existence, in so far as it is to close the doors to what we truly are.

It is in this humanity of ours that God continues to offer us the gift of vocation, ceaselessly whispering to us: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (Matthew 14:27). "In the world, you will have tribulation; but have confidence, I have overcome the world" (John 16:39). "And know that I will be with you until the end of time."

# *Month of the Sacred Heart*

*30 MASSES*

*will be offered at our three mission centres in honour of the Sacred Heart, for these and your intentions*

For your spiritual and material needs and for health in mind and body

For peace and justice in the world, especially where there is war and conflict

For sick and terminally ill among your relations and friends



For the needs of your family, especially for serenity, unity and the practice of the faith

For all Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, particularly those who are ill or exposed to danger

For any specific intention(s) you may wish to make

*O, how much upon the Cross  
Didst thy bowed head, O Christ,  
Thy hands flung wide, Thy open heart Breathe forth love.  
Son of God who didst come to redeem the lost,  
Condemn not the redeemed  
Crying out Thee from the valley of tears.  
Good Jesu, hear thou our groaning,  
And take not the measure of our crimes.  
We implore thy wounded Heart,  
O tender God*

*Write your intentions for the sacred heart masses on the leaflet provided and return to your nearest mission office.*



## COMBONI MISSIONARIES

Visit our websites:

[www.comboni.org.uk](http://www.comboni.org.uk)

[www.combonimissionaries.co.uk](http://www.combonimissionaries.co.uk)

[www.combonimissionaries.ie](http://www.combonimissionaries.ie)

[www.southworld.net](http://www.southworld.net)

