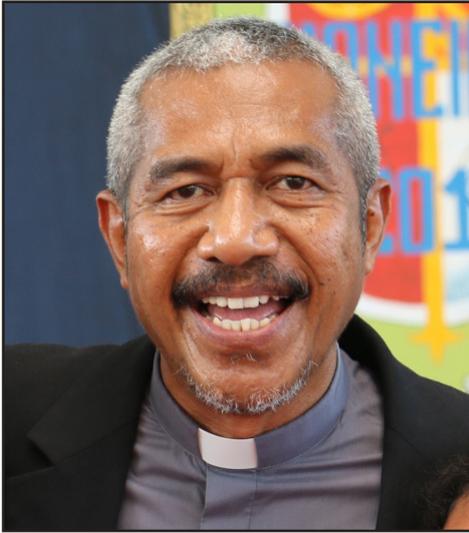


“Laid in a manger, He became our food”



Beloved brothers and sisters,

This beautiful symbolism is an expression of St. Augustine from his Sermon (189, 4). Holy Father Pope Francis refers to it in his letter ‘Admirabile Signum’ on the meaning and importance of the Nativity Scene. The Holy Father sent out this letter on the first day of Advent during his visit to Greccio where St. Francis of Assisi first started the tradition of the presepio or nativity scene in 1223.

“Laid in a manger, He became our food.” The Eternal Word of God humbled Himself out of compassion for humanity so that all the creatures who lives in death may regain life in His divine love. This generous self-emptying of God is the source of our salvation and of our expressions of charity. The year 2019 is a year of living and witnessing this spirit for the Jesuits in Timor Leste.

We started the year by implementing the ET Region’s Apostolic Plan for the next five years. Soon after, we received the mission from Holy Father to the universal Society, with apostolic preferences that resonate so much with our own apostolic priorities. (We give thanks to God for that!) In August, the whole Region gathered for an annual 8-day retreat to pray over, to interiorize, and to own these directives from the Region and universal Society. It was a time of grace for the Region to grow in companionship and mission, and a space for spiritual conversation with God and with the brothers in the Region. These days, as we near the year, is a time for us to evaluate our priorities in line with our monitoring and possible improvement of the apostolic plans.

At the beginning of this year, the Region was able to establish a working board of trustees for our education project in Kasait. This is a great development for us because the board gives a space for discussion and setting clear directions of our schools and in making important decisions and policies. In March, the Region also conducted a three-day Financial Sustainability Workshop for all the schools in Kasait and in Railaco. The workshop aimed at fostering capacity of each of our educational ministries to mobilize local and international resources with the long-term view of financial sustainability.

In September, to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the martyrdom of our brothers Fr. Albrecht Karim SJ and Fr. Tarcisius Dewanto SJ, the Region decided to erect a simple monument in honor of all the Jesuits who have been part of the East Timor mission, starting from the missionaries of Soibada in 1897 up the present. All have been examples for us of self-giving service to our King and Lord.

At the end of November this year, we have gathered the first fruits of our collaboration in the completion of studies of the pioneer students of Instituto de São João de Britto (ISJB). Despite the fact that the Timor government was not able to deliver its promise to legally and officially approve

the graduation of ISJB on time, there still was big reason for us to celebrate this first success of our Institute. Provincials, friends, mission-partners, and the Jesuit Mission Australia were among the witnesses to this success of collaboration and partnership.

Allow me to mention some other initiatives and events in the Region this year that further raise our gratitude to God: the inauguration of various water projects by Jesuit Social Service, the fruits of the ongoing restructuring of Casa de Produção Audiovisual (CPA), the visit of the Consortium Provincials and Jesuit Mission Australia, the initiatives of many individual donors and benefactors, the various visits of our friends and mission partners who brought hope and encouragement to us, and the first spiritual programs of our Centro de Espiritualidade Inaciana (CEI). This is just to mention some, while appreciating so many others more, to raise our awareness that the life and mission of the Jesuits in Timor this year continue to be a witness of the selfless giving of so many companions and friends.

The Jesuits in the Region continue to be a small community assisted by so many collaborators, partners, and donors. That is why, in my annual visit to communities, I always give time to listen to as many collaborators and friends as possible. The community breathes better this year with the ordination to the priesthood of our brother Roberto Encarnação Madeira in July (Dili) and the ordination to the diaconate of Julio Antonio Sousa Costa in November (Belo Horizonte, Brazil). Again we are grateful to all who have been part of their formation – the Arrupe International Residence, the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP), the Indonesian Province, the Jesuit Conference of Latin America, and the Province of Brasil.

But the Region also has to say goodbye to our brother Fr Erick John Gerilla (PHI) who will begin his Tertianship program in Australia in early 2020. As Region Treasurer, Director of Jesuit Social Service, and Development Officer, he played an important key role to the Region for the past six years. His witness of life as Jesuit in generous self-giving and in professionalism in the various missions given him has helped the Region grow and strengthen its structure and mission. We cannot be less grateful to Fr. EJ and to the Philippine Province for sending us Fr EJ. As we pray for a fruitful experience of the last probation of Fr EJ, we also pray that the Spirit will bring him back to us in Timor for more years in mission.

“Laid in a manger, He became our food.” The generous self-giving of so many companions in the journey has been life-giving to the Jesuits in this Region, and through us, to all the beneficiaries. Reviewing the year that is going to end, I cannot but see this Advent spirit of the compassion of our God towards the wounded humanity. The Lord calls us to imitate Him in deeds of heroic charity, and here in Timor we are witnessing the so many friends giving ears and hearts to that call. On behalf of the Jesuits and of all that we serve, I would like to present, once again, our heart-felt gratitude and prayers. This is the best gift we can to the child Jesus as we kneel in silence and adoration in front of the Nativity Scene. Let His compassion be born again in our hearts (St. Augustine).

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year 2020!