



CARMELITE MISSIONS

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"The child in us smiles back with a warm, grateful heart"

Prayers and Support for Our Friends in Africa continued...

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Love and peace,

Fr. John Mally, O. Carm.

Director of Carmelite Missions

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and your support
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more than ever.**

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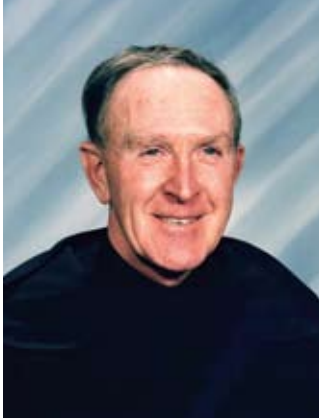
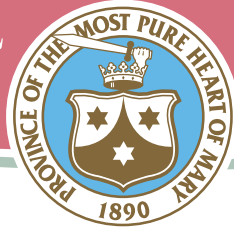
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**Carmelite Missions
8501 Bailey Road
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CARMELITE MISSIONS



Father John Malley, O.Carm.
Director of Carmelite Missions

Prayers and Support for Our Friends in Africa

The people of Africa can easily be forgotten. Ordinarily, they are not in the world's limelight. They are seldom mentioned in the news or seen on television, unless, unfortunately, there is a tragedy!

Still, this Mission office supports the work of our Carmelite Family in nine countries of Africa. In this newsletter, I want to share with you about the ministry and outreach of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the central African country of Rwanda. They originally were a Spanish congregation, and they presently serve in parochial, educational, and hospital ministries in eight countries around the world.

The Sisters founded various communities in Rwanda during the 1970s, and I have had the opportunity to visit them on three different occasions. My final visit was in February 1994, only a few months before over 500,000 people were massacred in the terrible genocide that took place, as the majority Hutu tribe (85% of the population) tried to completely murder the Tutsis tribe (15% of the people). Fortunately today, the country is at peace under a Tutsis government that, quite incredibly and magnanimously, is striving to establish a climate of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace for all Rwandans.

Recently, I received a letter from Sister Juana, the Superior of the Sisters, in the capital city of Kigali. She shared news with me about many of the Rwandan members, both of the Hutu and Tutsis tribes, whom I first met in 1986, when

they were postulants and novices. Some of these, like Sister Mary Grace and Sister Patrice, are now the local superiors, directors of formation programs, or responsible for religious education.

Sister Juana also shared many of their pressing needs: support for their spiritual and educational formation, and help for their outreach programs to the people and the children in the poorest villages where the Sisters serve. They also have a mission in the neighboring country of the Congo, where civil war and destruction still take place.

I ask you most sincerely to remember these Sisters and the people whom they care for so beautifully in Rwanda, both in your wonderful generosity and in your prayers during this month of August. Providentially, and most remarkably, there is a stable peace in a country that just 15 years ago was engulfed in a tragic conflict of genocide. God's presence among them has been so deeply needed, and today it is truly being felt.



Saint of the Month

St. Bernard 🌸 Feast Day – August 20

The Trappists are noted for their very strict monasticism. Until the Second Vatican Council suggested a few modifications, they led a life that most found edifying – but forbidding. They never talked, never ate meat, fish, cheese, or eggs. They arose at 2 AM from a bed of boards and straw and spent their time in prayer and work. Some false information was spread about them: that they dug a shovel full of their grave each day. This was not true, but they were strict and austere. They are the disciples of St. Bernard. He did not found the Order, but he was its chief influence and best-known saint.



Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, c. 1505-8.

Early Life

Bernard's beginnings go back to 1090 when he was born the third child and son of Tescelin and Aleth Sorrel of Fontaine, a part of present-day France; his was a family of upper nobility and a vassal of the powerful Duke of Burgundy. He was born in an age of faith when cathedrals were built and crusades were fought, when religion played a very strong influence in everyone's life.

His older brothers followed the military, but Bernard had no stomach for that and attended school at Chatillon where he did very well. He was quiet and reserved, yet amiable and, on occasion, very witty. But there was nothing exceptional in his life. On Christmas Eve, 1100, when Bernard was ten, the family prepared for the Midnight Mass. As the ceremonies would be long, they took a nap before, and Bernard had a dream that made a lasting impression. He dreamed of the Nativity scene, and Mary and Joseph seemed very close to him. Saying little, he thought a lot about it, and from this point, he turned his whole life to God.

At twenty he was a very normal young man of Fontaine: blonde hair and a reddish beard, light-skinned, a bit above medium height, blue-eyed with a virile yet gentle attitude. Modest and timid, he sought silence, and his devotion to Mary earned for him the title, "Mary's lute player." About this time, he decided on a religious vocation. His father was away, and his mother had recently died, so he went to his uncle Gaudry, who encouraged him in his desire to go to Cîteaux. This was a small austere monastery that had been founded a few years before by St. Robert, St. Alberic, and St. Stephen Harding.

Entrance into Monastic Life

Bernard, however, did not rush to Cîteaux immediately. He did something that probably makes him eligible for the Guinness Book of Records. He was able to use his family home at Chatillon, and he first persuaded his uncle



"The Apparation of the Virgin to Saint Bernard", by Filippino Lippi, c. 1486.

Gaudry and three of his brothers to join him. His brother, Gerard, was a knight and reluctant to give up his military life. Then he was wounded and taken prisoner. After escaping, he joined the group. That meant five brothers for the monastery. The youngest, Nivard, was too young, but eventually he too came. In time his father joined and his sister entered the convent – the whole family was in religious life! Not only his brothers, but other young men also joined, and they prepared themselves at Chatillon. In April 1112, Bernard with 30 others whom he had recruited, left home and presented themselves to the Abbot, Stephen Harding, and asked to be admitted. Up to now, the abbey had precious few vocations, and this record recruitment by Bernard presaged the growth that would soon be experienced by the Cistercians (Trappists).

The formation program in the novitiate went by quickly, and it is at this period that the famous quote about Bernard came into being. "Bernard," he asked himself, "why have you come here?" He reminded himself that "he came to intimately join himself with God." For about three years, he absorbed

the instructions of Abbot Stephen; his natural gift of leadership became apparent among the members of the monastery.

The Founding of Clairvaux

In June 1115, the abbot made an announcement to the monks. Property had been given to the monks in a wilderness called “Clear Valley,” so called because of the way that the sun shone in. Bernard, though only 25, was to go as abbot of the 12 monks selected for the foundation. With a little baggage, they started the seventy-five mile journey to Clear Valley – in patois, “Clairvaux!” The foundation date was June 25, 1125, the start of one of the most famous monasteries in Europe – even to this day.

First came a few huts and then a chapel. The wilderness was searched for available food, and the monks learned to exist with the barest necessities. Bernard had not been ordained nor blessed as abbot, so he went to Chalons where Bishop William of Champeaux ordained him and blessed him as abbot. A new friend was made with this bishop who eventually, before death, was professed as a Cistercian monk and died in the white habit.

Work on a permanent foundation went slowly, and the first years were extremely severe, with their daily diet well below subsistence level. Luckily, neighbors and friends came to their assistance during some difficult times, and it was ten years before they could care for themselves and help the poor as they were committed to do by their rule. As abbot, Bernard could regulate his own life, but unfortunately he subjected his body to such extreme mortification that he ruined his stomach, lost his sense of taste, and could hardly digest food. His friend, Bishop William, learned of this, and he made him take a year away under his own guidance and direction. He did get better and learned from this to teach moderation to his monks, but he never regained his ability to digest properly.

Bernard the Teacher

As a monk, he did the same manual work as the others, accepting menial jobs as sweeping the floors, washing the refectory bowls, and splitting wood. The monks, however, were anxious that he should spend his time in study, so that he could preach to them. He told them, “I am willing to pray, read, and meditate, on the one condition that it should not cause all of you any harm.” He learned well, as his sermons not only gave the monks spiritual food but they became classics of the spiritual life.

When he preached of Mary, he was especially fervent. Not only is he given credit for composing the famous prayer in honor of Mary, the Memorare (“Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary..”) but also part of the “Hail Holy Queen” is attributed to him. We still have today many of his other prayers to Our Blessed Mother, and because of these and his sermons, Bernard is considered the last of the Church Fathers, on a par with Saints Ambrose, Augustine, and John Chrysostom. He was also declared a Doctor of the Church in 1830 by Pope Pius VII.



Clairvaux soon became a showcase of holiness with Bernard as the prime exhibit. People flocked to him for advice and help, and they never seemed to be disappointed. From France his fame spread all over Europe. He was constantly being called upon to give insights not only about theological and spiritual problems but also to settle civil and political issues among many of the leaders of Europe. He was not a scholar in the terms of a Thomas Aquinas or a

Bonaventure, but he was a great writer and preacher, able to affect much good. We have close to 300 sermons that were taken down, and from them there is a rich mine of spiritual lore. He sought to influence his own monks and the nearby clergy by example, and this was obviously very significant. He started at Clairvaux with twelve monks, and at his death there were 700 in that monastery, and from there 68 other monasteries were founded.

Final Years

Bernard spent forty-two years at the monastery of Clairvaux, and though he was often called away, he would return as soon as his mission for the wider Church was accomplished. By 1153, at the age of sixty-three, he was spent and so weak that he could hardly move. But he insisted on saying Mass as long as he could stand up. His stomach refused all food, his legs swelled up, he was in constant pain and could not sleep. On Wednesday, August 19, he was given the Last Rites of the Church and Holy Viaticum. The next day, the 20th, he quietly gave his soul to God. The anniversary of his death is his Feast Day. At once crowds came to honor in death him whom they loved in life. It was not long before Pope Alexander III declared him a saint on January 18, 1174.

He desired to be buried before Our Lady’s altar in the monastery of Clairvaux, as he often referred simply to himself as “Mary’s lute player,” always eager to sing her praises. He lives today in so many ways, but especially in the hearts of Christians devoted to Mary who pray to her as he taught, *“Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of Virgins, my Mother; to thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petition but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen!”* ❀