



To my dear Brothers and Sisters, members of the Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence (Rosminian), to the Adopted Sons and to the Ascribed Members.

As with my ordinary Christmas mail, this Letter comes to you even later than usual and I do apologise for that. My only excuse is that I was in East Africa (Tanzania and Kenya) up to December 2nd and since I came back to Rome I have been very busy with other things.

In this short letter, I would like to mention two important Church events this year (the Pope's proclamation of the Year of the Priest and the Second African Synod) and also some Rosminian Family events.

Proclamation of the Year of the Priest.

On June 16th, the Holy Father, taking as his cue the 150th anniversary of the death of Jean-Baptiste Vianney (better known to many as the Cure of Ars), patron of parish priests, proclaimed this year as the Year of the Priest. (It will run from June 16th to the corresponding date next year). Though the Pope's Apostolic Letter is addressed to priests, it concerns all of us. The Pope defined the priesthood in the words of the Cure of Ars: *"The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus"*. The words of the saintly pastor bring to mind a lovely story quoted in a recent Indian book on the priesthood. "A priest told me this story. As a young deacon, he was sent to a parish in London to train for the Summer. During his first week working in the parish, he found an old down-and-out man in the back of the Church one evening. He was eating a burger and drinking a bottle of Guinness. The correct young deacon went up to him and informed him that this was a Church and not a restaurant and asked him to leave. The old man took no notice of him and continued to babble away to himself. The deacon went later in exasperation to the parish priest. He smiled and said "That is David". Years ago he had come over from Ireland with his family. He had a great job. They were very happy and had the prospects for a wonderful future. One day a car hit David. He lost his memory totally and could never again remember who he was or recognise his family. He ended up on the street. He had made the back of this Church his shelter during the day. This story changed the young deacon's views of the old man. Over the Summer, he often watched him muttering away to himself at the back of the Church. He had a very unusual way of praying. He would kneel in a pew and babble while milling the air with his outstretched hand. The deacon never heard him utter a clear word or a clear sentence. The touching image of this haunted and forsaken man always at prayer at the back of the Church began to move him. On his last evening there, he went down and knelt beside the man. He told him that tomorrow he would return to Ireland to finish his study and become a priest. He asked the old man to say something to him about what a priest should be. For one moment the old man focussed, looked at him and said: *"The sympathy of God"*. It was the only sentence

anyone had ever heard him saying”. Jesus is the human embodiment of this sympathy or compassion of God and so every priest, an *alter Christus* like the Cure of Ars, has to be the same.

Whilst asking us to remember with gratitude the many priests who are living representatives of God’s mercy to us, the Pope was obliged in truth to sadly refer to cases of infidelity on the part of some priests. This has become more evident with the recent revelations of the cases of child abuses by some priests, Diocesan and Religious, in Ireland. The report documenting these abuses also revealed the systematic cover-up by Bishops and religious superiors of many of these abuses for fear of causing scandal to the faithful and of damaging the name and the image of the Church. As a result of their inaction, more children continued to be damaged for life. All this has resulted in the reputation and the image of the Irish Church being brought even more into disrepute and with a total lack of credibility than if appropriate measures had been taken at the beginning. There is a lesson for us in all this. Every institution, religious or civil, is sensitive about protecting its good name and there is always the temptation to cover up unpleasant facts, even when justice and the safety of those in our care demand that we should be more open and to take decisive action. I ask your prayers for the many faithful priests in Ireland and elsewhere who are now being treated with scorn and mistrust.

Naturally, the Pope does not refer in his Apostolic Letter to Rosmini as a model of the Priesthood (the Cure of Ars is naturally the only person mentioned) but he could well have done so. That Rosmini had a high conception of the dignity of the office of priesthood is obvious from his conferences to priests (to be found in the book “Talk to Priests”) and in his Letters. (The index of the Italian volume 4 of the Ascetical Letters has three entire pages of references to priesthood). In one of his conferences, he says that Jesus Christ, the Man-God, is the special model of priests and one who “appointed priests to keep burning on earth the immense love of God” – a definition of priesthood akin to that quoted by Pope Benedict in his Apostolic Letter. His one year stint as Rovereto parish priest was a model of priestly service. Numerous are the testimonies of saintly contemporaries that he lived out the high ideals of priesthood that he advocated. One well known testimony is that of John Bosco who wrote that he had never seen a priest celebrating Mass with such devotion and recollection as our Founder.

The Second African Synod of Bishops. (Rome, October 4th-25th)

The theme of the Synod was “*The Church in Africa at the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*”. At the end of the Synod, fifty seven propositions were offered to the Pope for a document that he may write on the work and life of the Church on the African continent. (Similar propositions given by the first Synod were the basis of Pope John Paul’s Apostolic Exhortation “The Church in Africa”).

The final message of the Synod was a general overview of the political,

social and economic situation of Africa and of the Church's role in becoming an effective agent for change and development. For the Synod, reconciliation, justice and peace were essential requirements for this to happen. "The Synod has been able to concentrate on a theme of the greatest urgency for Africa, of service to reconciliation, justice and peace in a continent which is very much in dire need of these graces and virtues". Another basic conviction of the Synod in this regard is that the first and most specific contribution of the Church to the people of Africa is the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. "For a commitment to development comes from a change of heart and a change of heart comes from conversion to the Gospel". This is the basis for any reconciliation and the whole Church must be mobilised to work together in a unity that brings strength. An African proverb "An army of well organised ants can bring down an elephant" is quoted to show that strength is in unity.

The contents of the Message can be grouped under three general headings: the African church, the political system and the international community.

The African Church: The Synod stressed the need for bishops to put issues of reconciliation, justice and peace high on the pastoral agendas of their dioceses which also should be models of good governance, transparency and good financial management. It called on priests to be faithful to their commitments, particularly to a life of celibacy in chastity as well as detachment from material things. Speaking of the growth in religious and priestly vocations in recent years, it thanked religious for their witness in following the evangelical counsels and which makes them prophets and models of the Synod's theme.

With regard to the Christian faithful it stressed the importance of the small Christian communities, the role of families and youth, the need to defend the rights of women and of establishing local Church structures to ensure their relevant participation in Church affairs.

On the point of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, the Synod referred to the Pope's homily at the inaugural Mass where he had said that "Africa is the spiritual lung of today's humanity" and to his warning that this lung ran the risk of becoming infected by the double virus of materialism and religious fanaticism. Regarding the latter point, the Synod stressed the need for religious dialogue, particularly with Muslims. However, it said that true dialogue and collaboration would only thrive where there was mutual respect and so the Synod called on all countries to allow freedom for Christians to practise their religion and to share their faith.

Political system: Given the political corruption in some countries, it called on Catholic politicians and Heads of state to follow the example of Julius Nyerere (first president of an independent Tanganyika, now Tanzania) whose cause of beatification has been introduced. Whilst expressing its admiration for the few African countries that have democratic systems, it condemned those leaders who

are responsible for the civil wars that are causing death, injury and displacement to so many innocent people. “Those who control the affairs of those nations must take full responsibility for their woeful performance... The Synod proclaims it loud and clear. It is time to change habits for the sake of present and future generations”.

The International Community: regarding the services being offered by some international agencies, the Synod denounced “all surreptitious attempts to destroy and undermine precious African values of family and human life”.

It called on the great powers to treat Africa with respect and dignity. “Africa has long been calling for a change in the world economic order because of the unjust structures that had been heaped on her”. Many of the conflicts, war and poverty of Africa have been caused by that. It said that the recent turmoil in the financial world showed the need for a radical change of rules as expressed by Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate*.

Conclusion: The Synod expressed its confidence in a bright future for the continent. “We share with you the strong conviction of this synod that Africa is not helpless. Our destiny is still in our hands. All she is asking for is the space to breathe and thrive.” Amen.

Institute of Charity News.

Gentili Province.

For those of you who know little of Gentili and why he is an apt choice as patron of the new amalgamated province of the British, Irish, American Provinces and New Zealand Region, a very brief and readable biography has recently been produced by Father Antonio Belsito in the form of a special edition of the Rosminian ‘Witness’ magazine which he edits. For now something about this remarkable follower of Rosmini. Born in Rome in 1801 he became a lawyer but, aspiring to join the Roman society circles, he devoted himself to the study of languages and soon became fluent in English, French and Portuguese. His proposal of marriage to a young heiress with the exotic name of Anna Mendoza y Rios was dismissed out of hand by her two guardians (one of whom was Bishop Baines, bishop of the Eastern district in the UK, who later on was to invite the Father Gentili, now a priest, to be spiritual director in his seminary!) who promptly whisked the young lady back to England. (In time she became Lady Bellew and Gentili met her again in Ireland). As can happen at times, the rejected young lover then resolved to dedicate his life to God. Providentially, he came under the influence of Rosmini who had come to Rome to see the Pope about his new Institute and to see to the publication of one of his major works, “The Origin of Ideas”. Rosmini advised him to study for the priesthood which he did in the Irish College of the time. Ordained priest in Rome in 1830, he eventually went to the novitiate at Calvario. After a few weeks there, he was nominated novice master by Rosmini who greatly admired his intelligence, pastoral zeal and his holiness.

Sent to England in 1835, he first served in the seminary of Bishop Baines and then as chaplain at Grace Dieu Manor to a prominent Catholic English nobleman. His pastoral zeal could not be confined within these narrow limits and eventually he was designated an itinerant missionary conducting parish missions (an innovation in England) during which he wore the Roman collar (something never before seen in that country). He likewise introduced practices of piety such as the renewal of baptismal vows, the '40 hours' Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the May devotion to Our Blessed Lady along with public processions with her statue. (The first such procession was in Coventry in England to counteract the bawdy annual festival enacting the legendary ride of the unfortunate Lady Godiva through its streets).

His parish missions in Ireland were likewise a resounding success and he and other priests had to spend hour on hour in the confessional box ('the hospital of souls' – Pope Benedict) . Worn out by his continual labours, he contacted the typhoid plague that was raging in the squalid area of Dublin city where he was conducting his mission and it was there that he died on September 26th 1846. His funeral procession to the cemetery, where his coffin was put in a vault of the Patriot Circle, was the largest seen in Dublin up to then. Glowing tributes were paid to him by prominent English churchmen including Cardinal Newman (who will soon be beatified). Had the cause of Gentili's beatification been introduced soon after his death when his memory was still fresh in peoples' mind, it is likely that he would have been beatified. However it was felt in the Institute that it would not right for the son (Gentili) to be beatified before the father (Rosmini) and so nothing was done. Gradually the memory and the exploits of this extraordinary man faded from public consciousness, though there is still a strong devotion to him in an area of England (Shepshed) where his apostolic zeal first burst beyond the confines of his chaplaincy duties. The same is true of Omeath (Ireland) to which place his body was removed in 1932. His coffin lies in a vault in the grounds of the open-air Stations of the Cross (known locally as Calvary) and this is visited every year by many people.

After this potted biography of Gentili, a few words now about the development of the Province which bears his name. Early this year, it was decided that the formal inauguration should be delayed until 2010 and so the projected Provincial Congregation of the new Province in Dublin in October would rather be an opportunity for brethren coming from four parts of the Institute to get to know each other. It would also be an opportunity for them to air their views on the many issues relating to the new province. Highlight of what turned out to be a very successful meeting was the celebration of Mass in a Church in Johns Lane near to where Gentili died, and then a pilgrimage to Omeath to say a prayer at his tomb.

The inauguration of the Province will now be on June 15th of 2010, the 165th anniversary of Gentili's arrival in England. In the following September, there will be a commemorative function at Omeath and then the Provincial Congregation

will take place in Dublin from October 18th to 22nd.

Sisters of Providence Rosminian.

This year the Congregation celebrated the second centenary of the birth of Mother Giovanna Antonietti, its first Mother General, to whom Rosmini entrusted the care of the Sisters. A highlight of the various events of this anniversary year (running from January 5th January 2009 to the same date January 2010) was the August 30th gathering at Baceno (a mountain village near Calvario) where Mother Giovanna was born.

Professions in the Congregation.

This year, eight young women took First Vows in the Congregation (seven in Tanzania and one in Italy). The Congregation had the further joy of the Final Profession of five Sisters (Sisters Carmelina, Mary Helen and Angelina in India, Sister Mary Agatha in Tanzania and Sister Alba in Italy). Thirteen Sisters in all and for which fine number we all give thanks to God.

Developments.

In Tanzania the Sisters are in the process of building a series of small houses, adjacent to their hospital in Kwediboma, as a reception cum educational centre for children suffering from Aids. In India, meanwhile, at the pressing invitation of the local Bishop, they are about to start a kindergarten school in Maharashtra diocese which has urgent need for such basic services.

Institute of Charity Developments.

East Africa: On November 29th (the First Sunday of Advent) at the equally pressing insistence of the local Bishop (this time of Tanga), the pastoral care of Lushoto parish in the Usambara Mountains was entrusted again to the Rosminians. The parish, favoured due to its altitude with a cool climate and relatively free of mosquitoes, was one of the first to be developed by us until, like so many other parishes, it was handed over to the diocesan priests as they became available. The new pastor is Fr Polycarp Shayo, known to many from his three years as parish priest of St Alban's in Cardiff.

U.K.: In the UK, the ever increasing shortage of Rosminian brethren has led to our three traditional parishes in Cardiff being formed into a pastoral unit.

In its New Zealand Region, the same shortage of brethren has led to our withdrawal from the thriving parish of Glenfield in the Auckland Diocese of New Zealand.

Italy: The Italian Province has experienced what can be called a 'second spring' (an encouraging number of vocations in the past few year) but this Province too has the same problems of not enough active brethren for its apostolates. It is very grateful for the help now being given by young Indian brethren.

India: This latter Province, along with the East African Province, is still enjoying a steady flow of vocations. The Province was blessed this year with the

Temporary Profession of two young members and the priestly ordination of Shinto Kumminiyl, Martin Madavana, Biju Edakkalathur and Robin Thomas. Three other brethren (Saji Puthanpurkal, Henry Konnoth and Vinod Thennattil) are due to be ordained in January during my visit there and which will also coincide with the Provincial Congregation. Due to the fact that there was no Third Probation (the programme of preparation for Final Vows) this year, there were no Final Professions.

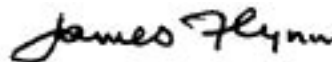
So we have a lot to thank the Lord for. As the Rosminian lights flicker in Europe (to adapt the famous words of Winston Churchill), they are beginning to shine ever more strongly in other parts of the Church.

In the Western world, however, all is not doom and gloom. Our Charism is more and more attracting people to become Ascribed Members. (An instance of this is the newly founded Ascribed group in the above-mentioned Glenfield parish from which we have just withdrawn). Here in Italy there has been an explosion in the number of Ascribed Members who find nourishment in Rosminian spirituality. More timid advances are noticed in other Provinces. Whilst many intellectuals say that it was a study of Rosminian philosophy that led them to a love of his spirituality most of us experience his lived spirituality through his Ascetical letters. Up to some time ago, these Letters were only readily available to Italian speakers. But now the translations of the late Fr John Morris and the present labours of Fr Donal Sullivan (his Volume 7 is ready for publication) mean that English speaking members can also access them. It must however be admitted that the Italian speakers still have the edge with the recent publication of Don Eduino Menestrina's Italian "Rosmini: The Man and the Saint", a collection of testimonies by various people who knew Rosmini. Also waiting for translation into English (and eventual publication) is the late Don Giorgio Versini's version of the Spiritual Calendar, a Rosminian 'Thought for the Day' taken from the letters and works of the Founder.

Also in the pipeline is Sr Michele Riva's cartoon life of Rosmini which will eventually be printed in Italian, English, Swahili and Malayalam.

In conclusion, I would like to wish each and all of you the sentiments that were expressed in one Christmas card: "The gladness of Christmas is joy, the spirit of Christmas is peace; the heart of Christmas is love. May all three be yours".

Faternally in our Blessed Founder,



Christmas 2009