

Triumph of the Heart

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL
TO ALL THE NATIONS

Family of Mary

2004 (III) / No. 29

*Virgin Mary, Queen of all the Saints,
help us to be gentle and humble of heart...
Help us to serve every person we meet
with joy and a smile.
Help us to be missionaries of Christ,
our peace and our hope.*

Pope John Paul II

The Indian Mission in South America

When St. Francis Xavier set off as an apostle for the Eastern Asian people, the Jesuits almost simultaneously began a highly active missionary effort in every pagan nation accessible to them. So the province of “Paracuaria” also emerged in the Society of Jesus comprising the modern-day countries Paraguay and Uruguay, and parts of Argentina, Chile and southern Brazil as well. There, in the heart of South America, on the shore of Uruguay and Parana, the first Paraguayan village and Indian settlement was founded just 400 years ago under the direction of the then Jesuit Provincial Diego Torres.

These great missions were closed settlements where Indians were brought together to live as a community.

*T*hrough this missionary effort, the Jesuits were able to win over the scattered Indian tribes to the Christian faith. In the span of 160 years (1608 - 1768) 1,500 priests and brothers from the order founded, in the jungle, 31 budding missions, whose construction was meant

to replicate the ancient church. Sometimes up to 7,000 inhabitants lived in peaceful unity under the guidance of a single Jesuit priest. Yet everything comes with a price—26 priests became martyrs!

Bounty hunters and forced labor

*P*ortugese slave traders, who came on the rivers from Brazil in the north with hundreds of boats, were notorious among the Indian tribes for their horrible man hunts. They dragged off thousands of Indians in their ambushes and used them as slaves in the mines and on the Brazilian plantations.

The riverfronts were quickly depopulated. In their desperation, the Jesuit priests fled south with the rest of the Indians down the rivers until they reached the tremendous waterfalls of Guaira. There the boats were dismantled and dragged on foot through the forests beside the waterfalls. A different danger threatened from

the south: the prosperous Spanish colonial lords had massive estates and they called for Indian workers which they quickly quit paying but coerced with capriciousness and oppression. Thousands died and many fled to the Jesuit missions because the Spanish king, through a royal mandate, declared the missions

to be closed structures and no strangers were to have access. Through this royal privilege, the Indians were protected there from the imaginably bad example, vice and corruption of the Spanish settlers as well as from the illnesses to which they had no resistance.

Life in the Missions

When building the Missions, the Jesuits always made sure that it was in a fertile area but safe from flooding. Sufficient fire-wood, wood for building and drinking water was essential. To make it possible for the missionaries to have an overview and to manage the mission, 2,500 to 7,000 Indians lived in relatively tight, city-like blocks. At the center was always a spacious church. On one side was the cemetery and on the other the priest's residence with a large flower, fruit, vegetable and herb garden which was always given the best care. Next came the widow's residence and orphanage, the courthouse, school, workshops and the communal storage and barn. A large plaza stretched out before the church. Here came together all the straight streets which bordered the rectangular housing blocks of the Indians and at the same time merged toward the place of worship. In front of the village, which was surrounded only by a cactus hedge, there was a guest house for traveling strangers, a plot for each adult Indian, plots for widows and orphans as well as communal plots and pastures with huge cattle herds, horses and sheep.

Far away from the Spanish settlements, each mission had to be self-sufficient if missionaries did not want the Indians returning back to the jungles. The Indians, therefore, worked three days a week in their own fields. On the other days, corn (their staple), wheat, rice, tobacco and sugarcane were cultivated. Cotton was also grown with great success even though the Indians were not so

enthusiastic about the hard work and had to be continually checked and rewarded. Handiwork was dearer to the Indians than tending the fields, and they practiced their crafts with fondness. One missionary wrote to Europe: *"We have made trumpets and watches here which are second to none from Augsburg. Our Indians can replicate everything precisely as long as they have a model before their eyes."* Active trading developed between individual missions, and the teaching workshops for artistic carving as well as building instruments like the organ and spinet grew in fame. Since everything was traded, there was neither money nor greed.


When Fr. Florian Paucke from Schlesien, who waited 11 years for permission to go to the South American missions, finally crossed into the mission he was supposed to take over, his predecessor whispered to him in the thatched, wooden church, *"Be courageous and modest!"* The young Jesuit, a master with the violin and a talented composer, recalled later in his memoirs, *"Courage, I said to myself as I stepped into my miserable hut, when I can call a box frame covered with stretched animal skins a hut."* He wrote further, "I made the greatest effort to learn the language, but I never found the necessary quiet time because my house was swarming with unsolicited guests. Dogs were camped out by my bed. The chickens disrupted my writing and could not be driven away for anything, and yet I cannot say that it would be difficult for me to live here. I won over my

people's affection because I warned them about one of the raids. My modest knowledge in the area of carpentry and use of a lathe brought me the complete approval of the community, from which I soon received help."

"Music lessons lured more and more boys, and even the unbaptized Indians came to our Masses for the music and singing. Once I even received an order to bring my 20 best singers and musicians to the center of town so that everybody could hear them.


"Everyone was amused by the devotion of my Indians. When I left, they were all behind me. If I paid someone a visit, they waited for me outside the door. They never needed permission to walk through the city alone because their parents, according to them, forbid them from leaving me because they were afraid, 'You, Father, could leave us and go stay with the Spanish.'"

A man with rare care and sensitivity, Fr. Paucke also motivated women and girls to spin, weave, and dye.

ften after their lessons, the "Father" guided the children through the workshops so that they could see for which craft they had skill and interest. Then he drew the flock of young people out into the fields where they playfully helped and could keep their earnings. In this way, he accustomed them to working.

Like the adults, each week the children were also assigned a saint; they could take this statue with them wherever they were working. At the workplace, a little area was set up to honor the saint and to ask his supervision. The Jesuit Fathers served the Indians as village councilor, mayor, supervisor of work, prefect of the police, peacekeeper and scribe on the side. Therefore the missionary was able to strengthen, not diminish, the natural authority of the chief. If the chief converted then so did his tribe. The missionaries' punishments were mild and the

fact that the Indians never rose against the Fathers in the Jesuit cities testifies to their very gentle methods.

he Holy Mass was celebrated every morning, and the Fathers put great value on solemnity and pageantry. Fr. Paucke satisfactorily described how "they slowly but surely beautified and decorated their church which lured more and more visitors to Holy Mass. When, on top of that, the children sang and played their instruments, the church filled up completely and I could preach before a large congregation. The church was soon too small, and the women stayed outside voluntarily with the little children 'so that they won't be a disruption' they said to my surprise.

"Some of the new converts found a very deep love for the Church. A young, pious widow, for example, who fasted every Wednesday and came every day to the catechism, asked me with sincerity on her deathbed that she really be buried in the church. She knew that the cemetery is also blessed but she wanted her body to rest in the same place where, while living, it was present for lessons about the Savior. Like her, I granted also others whose lives were marked by a pious change this favor, and through this, I achieved that many strove to become zealous Christians."

In the missions there were often theatrical events, games, horse races, feasts and processions, the most splendid of which was for Corpus Christi.

The monstrance was carried under triumphal arches decorated with flowers and leaves through all the streets and from house to house where colorful birds of the jungle were tied and flapping their wings and deer and even jaguars were leashed. Fruit, herbs, fish aquariums, and also sacks of wheat and balls of cotton were set up in front of the barns along the processional path to give glory to the Creator.

Finally, four dancers dressed as kings came out into the huge church plaza and danced in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Also the French Minuet, Spanish dances and even the horse dance were used by the Indians for the liturgical feasts. The Indians were especially conscientious of confession. "I often had to hold them back," wrote Fr. Paucke, "so that they did

not confess their sins out loud before the whole congregation. In the beginning I had to permit the men to enter the confessional with a belt on which they had made a notch for each one of their sins. For their different sins, the women used different colored threads and tied knots in them to keep count of the number of offenses. Later they were able to examine their conscience without these aids."

"The Indians love us like children love their father!"

The missionaries from Paraguay told a lot about the differences between the individual Indian tribes. Fr. Dobrizhoffer from Austria, for example, wrote about the Guarani: "It costs us no little time and effort to settle these nomadic, cannibalistic people under a divine and royal ordinance."

Despite their different characteristics, the Indians, in general, were regarded as incredibly quick learners, good-natured, guidable, very affectionate and submissive. Fr. Dobrizhoffer noted further in his records, "They obeyed the Jesuits, not as a slave his master, but as a son his father."

Especially noticeable was the Indians' amazing memory and their distinctive ability to imitate; based on a given model, they were able to complete even the most complicated tasks. Despite their manual dexterity, they lacked the talents of invention and improvement.

The Indians were also lacking in a futuristic view and provision planning. "If there is one people under the son," wrote Tyrolean Fr. Anton Sepp, "to which Jesus' words, 'worry about nothing for tomorrow,' were followed to the letter, it is our Indians." It took some time for the jungle people to accustom themselves to agriculture. Fr. Paucke told an example: Sluggish and lazy, the Indians watched as he showed them how to plow. "I tilled a few rows, and as I challenged them to continue, I heard an unexpected answer: 'You're doing great, Father, keep it up!'" Another time, because of their previously habitual and insatiable desire for meat, they

abruptly slaughtered their oxen in the field. If the missionary did not watch them carefully, every Indian would have been capable of eating several pounds of meat at once.

A deep-rooted vice of the Indians was alcoholism, but Fr. Paucke fought an ingenious battle against it: "As soon as the Indians gathered for a drinking binge, their women and children helped me to take away their spears in order to hinder deadly deeds done in drunkenness. As another one of these drinking feasts was announced, I friendly invited a reputable chief to a Paraguayan tea and I promised, 'I'll make you a drink that will not inebriate you and that tastes excellent.' He had hardly tasted it when he hooted, 'Yes, if every day I had this herb which doesn't give me a headache, I would renounce every other drink!' And soon the whole drinking society was fetching flowing tea from me." Among the Christian Indians, many really strove for a virtuous life. "One Christian asked me to teach her how to act around one of the pagans who was always looking for a fight. She lived exemplarily my exhortation about giving in: whenever the pagan woman was angry, she went away. Even once when the other threw her on the ground trying to start a brawl, the Christian stood up patiently, came looking for me and stayed by my side so that she would not become angry too.

"Thoughts about death were a trusted means with my Indians, above all that any time their life was in danger to seek reconciliation with God. Every woman came to confession before

she gave birth. I generally encouraged my Indians to make frequent confessions because otherwise they gave up too quickly on their efforts for a virtuous life. If they had confessed, my penitents often told me, they felt so good and they had no fear of death. They died then not only without fear, but with desire to go to the Heavenly Father. What a consolation for our missionary hearts.”

Devotion to God’s will showed itself especially when epidemics claimed thousands of Indians. Fr. Paucke also had to experience this: “Night and day I was both priest and doctor and I ran from hut to hut as pox raged through my village. Among the victims were also my best musician and craftsman. My gifted violinist, to whom I gave last rites, said to his parents, ‘Although I would like to remain longer with you, in order to help you since you are already old, still I love God more; therefore, I will leave you and go now to Him, but I will not forget you with Him. Live well, that we may come together again in God.’ “Another boy, the son of Chief Domingo, had only one concern about death,

that because of the pain he might not be able to think about God as easily as he was accustomed to. Anton, the deathly ill son of another chief, said, “Today is Friday. It would be good to die today, because this is the day Our Savior died. I will die, however, on Saturday, the day of Our Lady; she will call me.”

Sometimes it also happened that the Indians themselves became missionaries. Fr. Paucke, who lived in the St. Francis Xavier Mission for 18 years, always wanted to break away in order to bring other tribes to the faith. “*For this, however, I was hindered by the love of my community,*” he wrote. “They pleaded with me not to expose myself to the trouble of a distant move nor to make them mourn my loss. They begged me to send them to their relatives in the wilderness to win new followers of Christ’s teachings.

“The concern of my children filled my heart with joy. After four months and some days, our Christians returned with three new chiefs and their clans who wanted to become Christians.”

The Mission Accounts of Fr. Anton Sepp S.J. (1655-1733)

*T*he son of an estate owner in Klatern, South Tyrol, went to Vienna as a singer because of his extraordinary musical talents. As a young theology student, Anton also learned chants, harp, drums and various brass instruments as well; he also learned how to build organs. This would serve him very well later in South America. Fascinated by the missionary spirit of the Jesuits, he joined the order as a young priest and worked for 15 years in Vienna and Innsbruck. The South Tyrolean, who

was always ready for a project, still found time to study music and his beloved organ building. In 1690, they finally let the brilliant preacher go to the Guarani Indians, to the first mission built in 1610 on the confluence of the Paraguay, Uruguay and Parana rivers and where, from 1685 on, German missionaries worked as well.

Anton Sepp was the first one of them to send to Europe precise, original travel and mission reports which, because of his

cheerful disposition and untiring missionary zeal, gave testimony and a living insight to the daily life of the Indians. *I had to wait in the Sevilla monastery for more than a year with my missionary companions before our ship left for America,*” began Fr. Sepp in his famous “*Journey Description*” in September 1689. Together with his confrere and friend Adam Bohm from Amberg, Bava-

ria, he used his time to study Spanish and the Guarani Indians.

“We were introduced to caring for the sick and to construction of simple habitations and even churches! We also had to learn how to design a new mission and to manage it economically. We even learned about the jurisdiction of our future office.”

Then we were finally ready!

Trip to a Distant Land

“April 6, 1691: I would have preferred to record this day in gold rather than ink. Today our ship *Almirante*, after a long and tiring journey, arrived in Buenos Aires, an insignificantly small city that is not even half the size of Kaltern or Clausen back home in Tyrol.

“This morning we heard nothing other on La Plata, ‘The Silver River’, than the thunder of canon fire, the blare of trumpets and the merry cry of the people waiting on the shore. Quite a crowd of companions on horseback and on foot were awaiting our arrival, as were Indians with many children, Moors, baptized and unbaptized. As I stepped onto the American soil, I knelt down and kissed the ground.”

On May 1, 1691, Fr. Anton Sepp and Fr. Adam Bohm climbed aboard a raft with a small straw hut built on it and set off north of Buenos Aires. “The Indians knew how to row so well, that the priests could not tell if the raft was moving or not. They did not speak a word to one another the whole day, just so that the priests’ prayer would not be disturbed.

“After exactly 30 days of traveling on the Uruguay, our Indians decorated the raft with laurel branches and green leaves for our impending arrival. Then I heard the last sound that one would expect to hear in this sparse jungle land-

scape: church bells were ringing! The blast of trumpets threaded through the ringing of the bells and armed reports sounded from the shore. The welcoming cry of the Indians was deafening.

“A priest strode down from the knoll and pressed us to his chest, southern style. The small Sicilian introduced himself as Fr. Isidor. When we reached the top of the rise, the wall of people opened up and not even a couple hundred yards away lie the immense village. Fr. Isidor halted and said to me solemnly, ‘You will now be the Father of The Three Kings Mission. Accompanied by thousands of Indians, we priests went first to the church, and as Fr. Isidor lifted up a finely engraved monstrance for the blessing, the Indian people knelt down silently.

“After the impressive ‘Laudate Dominus omnes gentes’, every-body left the spacious church and on the great plaza in front, we witnessed, into the evening, four different dances, one more beautiful than the other. The first was with eight boys dressed in Spanish style, next two swordsmen danced with their weapons, thirdly six ship boys and finally six Indian boys on horseback who were real masters of riding.” On the next day, Fr. Anton Sepp was lead into his parish of 4,000 believers.

A Typical Day

*F*r. Anton elaborately described the daily schedule which, for him, always began an hour before sun-rise: “I climb out of my hammock, where it is much cooler for sleeping than in a hot bed, and plunge my face into a bowl of cold water. I dress quickly and carefully shake out my sandals before I slip them on. I have done that ever since I found once a coiled-up snake inside. The large family of the mission still lies in a motionless slumber.

“My first, and most important, corridor leads to the church, which is left unlocked day and night. I greet the most reverend Lord and, on my knees, sink into the daily meditation, because the strength of cheerful service for my poor Indians streams forth from there. When the little bell rings and my altar boys surround me, I cannot deny them pressing their snotty little noses against the back of my hand.

“Earlier, it was normal that the Mass during the week was silent. I began from the first day, however, to educate my Indians how to sing. When the Mass is finished, I send my village people with words of blessing in the Indian tongue to the different work areas, and I go sit in the confessional for a while.

“This time is kept short though because the boys and girls are already waiting at the rectory in the mission school for the lessons on our Christian religion. When the sundial reads 9 o'clock, it is time to visit the sick. My medical talents are not very far-reaching. They would have to teach more in our order's school. Yet a cheery, consoling word heals sometimes as well. If somebody asks, I hear their confession and give them the bread of everlasting life.

“Next I have to visit those on the workshop street. Often I have to be the adviser, motivator and decision maker. After eating, when there are no reports to hear from the butcher or the pastor

from the field, I go in my plant and herb garden for half an hour. In the afternoon, I have to look into the household school for the girls, where they learn to sew, spin, knit and cook. Still, my greatest joy is the music school, the one that I established and the only one that exists in Paraguay. What musical skill my Indians have!”

Later on, Fr. Anton would even be able to write, “I also instruct the Indians interested in music from the other missions, and even other missions' priests, how to play the organ, others on the harp, guitar and violin, others the blow of the schalmei and the clarinet.

“I also teach them how to make the instruments. Some Indians today know how to make a harp of David from resonant cedar wood.”

Back to the entry on a typical day, which is not over yet: “At harvest time, the supervisor calls the workers together after the meal. Musicians accompany them out to the fields. Music and song accompany every job, even threshing. Music and singing even accompany the filling of the granaries for the dry season. When I do not have a family visit planned, I also ride out and watch them move through the rows or count in the pasture.

“Finally, I have to visit the slaughter house in the afternoon to oversee the fair division of the meat. Some days, the dancers are waiting for me afterwards. I teach them some spiritual dances which I have read about in the high school in Innsbruck. Yes, dancing is in the blood of the Indians. If I would allow it, all the men would sign up for the dance school.

“The bells ring again punctually at 5 o'clock. Time for the Rosary and Christian teaching. Perhaps there is a baptism or a funeral to perform. At sunset, you hear the band in the distance which accompanies the harvest workers home from the fields, and I also have my rest then!”

Iron — Worth More than Gold

*F*ollowing the death of Fr. Adam Bohm, his friend Fr. Anton Sepp was sent to his mission, St. Michael. It was Fr. Anton's task to divide this huge village community and to open a second mission. That meant starting all over again! Seven hundred families volunteered to go and called out thankfully, "Father, we thank you that you will lead us to another land!"

The missionary traveled and searched for days before he could finally say, "This is the right place. 'Father, bless this place and put your sign from God over us!' the accompanying chieftain asked me and he meant that I should set up the cross as a sign of consecration and claim. I did it the very same evening and I never felt as happy as I did now, when I found a new, fertile land for 3,000 Indians.

"What's more? In my need to find more room for my Indians, I had to go very far east of the Uruguay River. Through God's beneficent guidance, I found iron ore there, a metallic treasure more valuable and useful for our mission than gold!"

Is this not a visible sign of God's infinite mercy?" Fr. Anton Sepp went zealously to work constructing the John the Baptist mission. Fr. Sepp noted in his diary, "In spirit, I saw already a brick-walled church standing before me and the beautiful sound of an organ inside. Would I live to see it?" He would experience both!

At age 58, Fr. Anton wrote in a letter, "I am sitting so deep in the land of the Indians from Paraguay that there is no way home anymore for me from this great, beloved land and its people far, far over the Atlantic from my beloved land Tyrol. I am not young enough anymore, but my spirit and my disposition have remained joyful in the pleasantness of the Lord.

"I have found my task in this earthly life, and nobody on earth could have been given more. If I can still make it several years before my great recall, I will accept it gratefully. My old head is still stock-full of new plans." This beloved and venerated Indian apostle never returned to his homeland. He died at age 78 among his Indians.

The Tragic Decline

*F*r. Anton Sepp did not have to witness the annihilation of his lifetime's work. Yet his brothers who followed him experienced the destruction of their mission as an indescribable martyrdom. Their economically blooming Indian village was not rich in a literal sense, but nevertheless the greedy Spanish settlers and traders became jealous and envious. Terrible slander was spread: the Jesuits are hoarding great gold and silver treasures in their inaccessible missions, and with their well-armed Indian troops they are preparing their own independent states. Portugese Minister

Pombal was especially ruthless; he made it his goal to destroy the work of the Jesuits. Through lampoons and hair-raising stories, he successfully stirred up hatred against them all over Europe. One destructive blow followed another. The rumors spread that the Jesuits wanted to overthrow the Spanish king. People were not afraid to show the sovereign Spanish coins which the Jesuits had allegedly already minted depicting their clandestine King Nicolas in Paraguay. In the end, all Jesuits were driven out of Portugal, Spain and their colonies. Robbed, guarded and without permission to

speaking, all Jesuit missionaries were led away with the brutal hardness of felons.

Fr. Schmitt, a 76-year-old priest from Switzerland, wrote, “*We had to leave the missions in the middle of the night. The sadness and pain, tears and mourning from the poor Indians is unspeakable!*”

The deported Jesuits never returned home to

their orphaned missions, from which many Indians fled back into the jungle. Exploited by the Spanish, the blossoming villages were ruined and disintegrated within a few years.

The way of suffering for the Jesuits lasted still longer! Packed together on ships, the highly-deserving missionaries were deported back to Europe like heretics and rebels.

The Imprisonment of the Jesuits (1759-1777)

The lock-up “*Sao Juliao da Barra*” near Lisbon is built on huge rocks in the estuary of the Tejo River. There, in an underground dungeon, Portuguese Minister Pombal made 124 Jesuits driven out of South America secretly disappear between 1759 and 1777, like in a concentration camp.

They sent especially the superiors of the order here. Without investigation, without due process and without official explanation, they were packed into damp prison cells where neither fresh air nor daylight came, and they were left to waste away. Just a few lamps with bad oil gave off light. Water dripped from the mossy walls. Worse was that when it flooded, water rose in the sewers and flowed into the cells more than a foot deep. As a result, there was such a terrible stink that the fathers almost could not breathe; they broke into a cold sweat and could not even pray anymore.

In these damp conditions, everything rotted: blankets, clothes, even the iron hooks in the wall rusted together completely. “*Everything decomposes in this tomb,*” scoffed the commander often when he made his rounds, “*only the imprisoned Jesuits don’t want to decompose.*” Huge rats, masses of roaches, spiders and other

bugs made their suffering even greater. On top of that, the Jesuits practically starved from bad food. Thinned down to just skin and bones, they resembled, in a short period of time, sick old men with grey hair, even though a short time before they had worked industriously in the missions of the South American Indians.

All this suffering would have come to an end in an instant, if the Jesuits were ready to leave the Society of Jesus. Yet in all the years in that dungeon, not a single one fell away. More over, the priests there tried also, faithful to their order’s slogan, to live a certain order and rule “*for the greater glory of God*” during the long, desolate days.

In spite of all their efforts, these priests suffered horribly from the brutal treatment, the continual darkness, the wet, the hunger, the isolation from the outside world and a dulling loneliness that led some to depression and hallucination. Three of them, in fact, did lose their minds with the time and became still another trial for their other brothers. The deprivation that was the hardest for all the priests was the strict prohibition from celebrating Holy Mass. So they had to live three long years without the strength of Holy Communion!

The Mother of the Bowed Head

Fr. Martin Schwarz from Amber, Germany, was also among those imprisoned. When he left for the Indian mission on the estuary of the Amazon in Brazil, he brought a small picture of Mary from Landshut with him as a reminder of his homeland. This picture was called “*Mother of the Bowed Head*.” Despite strict controls, he was able to smuggle this picture into the prison. There she was highly venerated and loved by everyone.

On September 8, 1762, the Feast of Mary’s Birth, Fr. Meisterburg from Bernkastel wrote a touching prayer to the Mother asking for the gift of the Holy Eucharist, which everybody so longed for: “*O Virgin Mother, you alone are our consolation in every torment! Hear our prayers, bow in grace. Send to us, bowed down, mildest Mother, the one whom you bore! Let not your servants lack the holy meal which HE gave!*”

How impressive it really must have been when these weakened Jesuits prayed this forceful prayer together for the Eucharistic Lord. They prayed it over and over again. Shortly thereafter, the impossible happened. The prisoners managed to celebrate the Holy Mass in secret and received Holy Communion. Fr. Thoman, with a lot of practice, baked the hosts on two pieces of iron held over the flame of his little lamp. Their joy was indescribable and they were all convinced that Mary had brought the Lord to them. The fathers thanked the “*Mother of the Bowed Head*” every day and

they unanimously made her the altar image because now they often celebrated the Holy Mass secretly during the night.

Thanks to the Holy Eucharist, the old, and especially the weakened, Jesuits found new bodily strength. Even the guards often wondered how they were able to survive. Among the prisoners, there were often visible healings of the sick, and even the dying would suddenly become healthy. On top of that, the fathers experienced such an interior joy through the eucharistic presence of the Lord that they even readily offered up their hard situation. Even more, they now found their torments to be a precious contribution, a grace to endure, for their orphaned Indians whom they had to leave. For this goal, some of them even consciously fasted for weeks on just bread and water! Fr. Kaulen wrote: “*We suffer continually and yet we enjoy constant happiness.*”

Fr. Schwarz died 11 years after his release and his picture of Our Lady was brought to several cities in Germany: Eichstatt, Regensburg, Feldkirch and Cologne and in 1936 to the Ignatius Church in Essen. Soon prayers made before this image were answered, and also during the Second World War Holy Mass could always be offered there, even though heavy bombing had taken place around the church. Unscathed, Our Lady still inclines her head today toward everybody who asks her for help.

The Liberation

In September 1773, the imprisoned Jesuits at “*Sao Juliao da Barra*” were brought the news, by the satisfied commander, that Pope Clements XIV had annulled the Society of Jesus.

Simultaneously, the already tattered black habits were torn from their bodies and replaced with ridiculous, colored clothes. The poor men were even forbidden, under the threat

of punishment, to cry about the abolition of their order. For the next four years the harassment became even more inhumane.

Only in 1777, after the fall of Pombal, were the Jesuits set free. From the 145 imprisoned altogether, 45 remained who had held out up to 18 years in the musty holes of “*Sao Juliao da Barra*”. The survivors were released in the course of the year but, 37 fathers would have rather given their life as a martyr than to have to pay for freedom by leaving their order.

It took weeks for the totally weak eyes of those who had been saved to adjust to normal daylight. In the same fashion, their lungs also little by little became accustomed to breathing fresh air. Fr. Thoman wrote: “*We all crawl around more dead than alive.*” Alone the fact that they survived was one great miracle when you consider that a young officer visiting the Jesuit cells passed out immediately because of the stuffy

air and other prisoners sentenced to the Jesuit prison died in a matter of months!

Fr. Schwarz was also among the survivors. When he had recovered his strength a little bit, he traveled to his home in Amberg in July 1777. While he had to count on a sudden death because of his weakness, he, like all of his companions, was allowed to carry the Blessed Sacrament and, naturally, his image “*Mother of the Bowed Head*”. In the damp cell, all but a little piece rotted, but the face was finely improved and the missing parts were replaced with brocade.

Fr. Schwarz worked a few years as a sought after confessor and was able to witness in 1781, from the highest judgment, that all Jesuits, living and dead, were declared innocent. Pombal already had leprosy by then and he died one year later without the sacraments which he refused to the end.

*Oh Loving Virgin, a single concern
I entrust to your motherly heart:
it is hard enough, when we lack ordinary food;
but here they deny us the bread of heaven:
we lack what strengthens us to eternal life!
You are our sure hope,
the Eternal Father's loving daughter,
the mother of the Son, bride of the Holy Spirit!
The day is still far off when the waves still,
the wave of others' hatred for God pounding against us;
calm at least, Oh Mother, the pain
caused by our holy hunger.
Give your servants your Son as food!
With the help of this Bread we will ride out the storm,
which hate enkindles against us without reason!”*

Excerpt from Fr. Meisterburg's prayer in prison

Greetings from Uruguay

Teaching catechism to the children is only a part of the mission in Uruguay. We interviewed our new missionaries who gave us some insight to their initial experiences in the Diocese of Florida.

Uruguay lies so far away from our homeland, and for most of our readers it is a totally foreign country. Could you tell us briefly, therefore, something about the land and the people who live there?

Uruguay is a very beautiful and fruitful country on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. It has a tropical climate and is pretty wet. Because we are on the other side of the equator, our seasons are the opposites of yours, so, for example, we celebrate Easter in the fall and Christmas in the middle of the summer. The ancestors of almost all the Uruguayans come from Spain and Italy. There are no longer any Indians here because in the fight for independence they were either killed or managed to flee to neighboring Paraguay or Brazil.

Uruguay has been in a difficult economic crisis for more than a year and, therefore, the poverty is growing continually here. Already one quarter of the population has left, seeking a better life in the United States or Spain. Because there is a strong separation of Church and State, there is no religious education in the schools here. Many parents send their children to catechism classes for three years, but it is often more of a general formation than something religious. The majority of people are Catholic, but non-practicing. Still, they all really like the Virgencita (the Blessed Virgin) and are happy to receive the prayer card from the Lady of All Nations. Most priests and missionaries who are working here are foreigners because Uruguay has few vocations of its own.

The beginning of a mission is always exciting. Everything is new, everything is unknown. How did the people react when you arrived there?

The first contacts with the people were wonderful and unforgettable moments. On the evening we arrived in Florida, Bishop Raoul Scarrone called the believers together; he had told them ahead of time that we would be coming. When we introduced ourselves at the end of the Holy Mass, they expressed their deep joy with applause. They all heartily greeted and embraced us, kissing us on the right cheek, as is the custom here. We had never experienced something like this before and we were astonished at how open the people were.

In the other parishes, where Bishop Scarrone brought us in the first two weeks, we were also received with a lot of love. The people were really thankful that we had come and they have shown us to this day their friendship.

As laborers in the field, the Lord has surely given you many tasks. What are they exactly?

Our most important task is adoration, that is, our unity with Jesus. How could we bring Him to the people if we are not united with Him? Then we try to accept with love the daily situations as they present themselves, and we concretely pray and sacrifice for all those who are entrusted to us. Only in this way can our exterior mission, such as youth

catechism, family visits or preparing children for first Holy Communion bear fruit.

*W*e have also formed a choir for the Sunday Masses with young people from the catechism classes. In the cathedral, we lead adoration on Thursday and the Holy Hour on Friday, where we pray the Stations of the Cross and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy with the believers. We should not forget the house work either—cleaning, washing, ironing and whatever else. Sometimes we also accompany Bishop Scarrone on his pastoral visits to the villages and parishes or to different feasts, like a bishop ordination a short time ago.

*W*ith so many different responsibilities, it is certainly not easy to organize your day, i.e., that with so many activities, the spiritual life is not cut short. What is a typical day like for you?

Our daily schedule is really rich in changes; that means we have to be flexible. We have prayer together in the morning in the chapel. Then we have breakfast. Throughout the day, different people ring the doorbell. Most of them are needy who come to ask us for food or medicine, young people from the parish who come by every now and again or simple people who want to share with us their difficulties and to pray with us. We try always to have an open ear and an open heart for everybody. More and more people are also coming to receive material about Jesus of Divine Mercy.

Since our arrival here in Uruguay we have understood that mediating God's merciful love is an essential part of our mission, and so we have also named our place "*The House of Mercy*". As soon as we arrived, we had pictures of Jesus of Divine Mercy and CDs and cassettes of the Chaplet of Mercy made which we offer at cost so that they are available for any social class.

Before lunch, we pray the Rosary together. The high point of each day is the Holy Mass which

we prepare for with silent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Then it is time to prepare dinner for the bishop; we are joyful that we have time with him each day. To finish, we meet again in the chapel so that we may conclude our day in the same way which we began it.

*E*specially today, a groundbreaking pastoral undertaking is very important for the youth, but, at the same time, it is also extraordinarily difficult because the young people are exposed to so many negative influences. What kind of experience have you had with the Uruguayan youth?

Perhaps the young people here, in general, are more open for prayer, at least in the villages and small towns. You feel the spiritual battle all the same because "*the world*" tries here also, with all its means, to bring them under its spell.

*I*n the life of every missionary, especially those so far from home, joy and suffering lie very close together. Despite the difficulties and obstacles which have to be overcome on occasion, you certainly have also joyful experiences. Could you share with us one of these experiences or some other high points from your still young mission?

Yes, the consecration of the chapel dedicated to Divine Mercy in the Florida Cathedral was especially nice. For this occasion, we were able to prepare a day of prayer for the Sunday of Divine Mercy last year. Believers from all over the diocese came by bus for this event. After the solemn Holy Mass celebrated by Bishop Scarrone, the six bishops present, including the papal nuncio of Uruguay, prayed a consecration, together with the priests and believers, before the 6.5 foot tall image of Jesus of Divine Mercy. In the afternoon, our spiritual father, Fr. Paul Maria, lead a Holy Hour and then a conference about "*The Suffering of Our Time and Divine Mercy*". Many were touched by grace and said that they had never experienced anything like it.

Some even had tears in their eyes, like the technician taking care of the microphone. Although he was not a practicing Catholic, at the end of the day he returned to confession after a long time. The seminarians of the diocese were also

happy to take material about Divine Mercy with them. Now, they pray the Chaplet of Mercy every day together in the seminary. Many came to thank us personally, and everybody went home happy and fulfilled.

Our Mission of Mercy in Uruguay

At the end of February 2004, Fr. Ludovit Maria, now Fr. Luis (his name in Spanish), and Fr. Juan Maria moved into their new mission. Bishop Raoul Scarrone and the faithful there, as well as our missionaries who came to Florida one year earlier, had been joyfully awaiting their arrival. Fr. Luis and Fr. Juan Maria were entrusted with the care of two parishes consisting of five churches by Bishop Scarrone.

Above all, it is their wish to transmit the infinite mercy of God to the people there. Our brothers and sisters would like to share with you a little bit about this mission.

*“I have the intervention of
God’s mercy to thank for my life.”*

*H*oracio, a man in his 40’s with two children who lives very close to our mission station in Florida, is very convinced, and you will understand immediately why. He is someone who really experienced a conversion, and his body as well as his soul can testify to that fact.

When he lost his job a few months back and fell into great financial need, he no longer knew what to do and he decided, therefore, to put an end to his miserable life. He put a pistol to his head and fired. He survived, but he was in a coma for a long time. The doctors thought that if he ever recovered, he would certainly be blind, deaf or severely disabled.

What happened though? To the amazement of everybody, Horacio awoke from his coma, and he had none of the predicted conditions. Slowly but surely he recovered his health completely, and only a few scars remain to remind him of his act of desperation. Horacio was aware that God saved his life with a miracle; however, his relationship with God did not

change at first. Only later did he come to learn about the depths of God’s mercy, and then it changed him forever.

When he was finally released from the hospital, he was confronted again with the same problems. His unemployment left him still in financial need. It was such a burden for him because of his children as he wanted so much for them to have a worry-free childhood and adolescence. To get a hold of his hopeless financial situation, he let himself be drawn into a bad situation which, this time, did not have a lenient result. He helped a couple buddies to rob an office; his responsibility was to overtake the guards. The police discovered him, however, and arrested him immediately. Since the prison is only a few minutes away from us, we were able to visit him often, and Horacio is still thankful for that. He had a lot of time to reflect and found, thereby, a totally new relationship with God. He is really sorry for what he has done, and whenever he thinks about what he did, his eyes fill with tears of repentance, but

also amazement. “*My life is a miracle,*” he often says because he understands always better God’s merciful love which gave life not only to his body, but more important, to his soul. He does not want to lose this again at any price.

Every day he prays the Rosary, it fills him with consolation and deep peace. He especially enjoys listening to the Chaplet of Mercy cassette which we gave to him once. Who does not think of the time when Jesus said to St. Faustina,

*“I follow sinners
with my mercy along all their paths.
When they turn back to me,
I forget all bitterness and I rejoice over their return...”*