



VOLUME 16, ISSUE 5



INDIAN PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

Dear Brothers and friends of Edmund,

Greetings from a hot and humid Goa.

On April 5th, the Founders feast day, Br. Jerry Ekka pronounced his final vows in the presence of his family, and a large gathering of Brothers and friends in St. Edmund's School Chapel. Jerry's Final Profession Vow sheet is included in the Newsletter.

This Newsletter also includes an article on our Founder-Blessed Edmund Rice based on anecdotal stories of his life. What was so wonderful about his life? To me, it was his commitment to being faithful to the message of Jesus no matter the many setbacks he received. He received more than his fair share of criticism both from the church hierarchy and his own brothers but never said an unkind word to anyone. As Christian Brothers today we need to spread his message of hope and universal brotherhood no matter the difficulties we may face.

On May 4th, Anish's Mother passed on in Vasai. She was brought to Goa by plane and buried alongside many other mothers of Brothers. A large number of relatives, brothers, past students of Regina Mundi and Abu, and friends were present to bid farewell to this very loving lady.

On May 20th, John Dang made his First Profession in the presence of the Province Leader, his family and a large number of friends and well-wishers in Bhopal. An account of this ceremony written by John will appear in the June Newsletter.

Our country has gone through a very important national election process. This election in particular was a very key moment for India. The future of the democratic process was at stake. One hopes that when the results are declared and in the months ahead one can speak the words of Tagore:

"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth"

Yours fraternally

Mark



A SPIRITUALITY OF THE ASCENSION

The Ascension throws some important light on the mystery of love and intimacy. What's the Ascension?

It's an event inside of the life of Jesus and the early church, a feast-day for Christians, a theology, and a spirituality, all woven together into one amorphous bundle of mystery that we too seldom try to unpackage and sort out. What does the Ascension mean?

Among other things, that the mystery of how we touch each others's lives is strangely paradoxical in that the wondrous life-giving power of arriving, touching another's life, speaking words that nurture, doing actions that build up, and giving life for another, depends also upon eventually leaving, being silent, absorbing rather than actively doing, and giving our goodbye and death just as we once gave our presence and our life. Presence depends too upon absence and there's a blessing we can only give when we go away.

That's why Jesus, when bidding farewell to his friends before his ascension, spoke these words: "It's better for you that I go away." "You will be sad now, but your sadness will turn to joy." "Don't cling to me, go instead to Galilee and I will meet you there."

How might we understand these words? How is it better that someone we love goes away? How can the sadness of a goodbye, of a painful leaving, turn to joy?

This is something that's hard to explain, though we experience it daily in our lives. Allow me an example: When I was 22, in the space of four months, my father and mother died, both still young. For myself and my siblings, the pain of their deaths was searing. Initially, as with every major loss, what we felt was pain, severance, coldness, helplessness, a new vulnerability, the loss of a vital life-connection, and, the brutality and finality of something for which there is no preparation. There's nothing warm, initially, in any loss, death, or painful goodbye.

Time is a great healer (though there's a lot more to this than simply what washes clean or is anaesthetized by the passage of time). After a while, for me this took several years, I didn't feel a coldness any more. My parents' deaths were no longer a painful thing. Instead their absence turned into a warm presence, the heaviness gave way to a certain lightness of soul inside me, their seeming incapacity to speak to me now turned into a surprising new way of having their steady, constant word in my life, and the blessing that they were never able to fully give me while they were alive began to seep



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ever more deeply and irrevocably into the very core of my person. The same was true for my siblings. Our sadness turned to joy and we began to find our parents again, in a deeper way, in Galilee, namely, in those places where their spirits had flourished while they were alive. They had ascended and we were the better for it.

We often have this kind of experience, simply in less dramatic ways. Parents, for instance, experience this, often excruciatingly, when a child grows up, grows away, and eventually goes away to start life on his or her own. A real death takes place here. An ascension has to happen, an old way of relating has to die, painful as that death is. Yet, it's better that our children go away. The same is true everywhere in life. When we visit someone, it's important that we come, it's also important that we leave. Our leaving, painful though it is, is part of the gift of our visit. Our presence partly depends upon our absence.

This however must be carefully distinguished from what we mean by the axiom: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." In essence, that's not true. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, but only for a while and mostly for the wrong reasons. Physical absence, simple distance from each, without a deeper dynamic of spirit taking place beneath, ends more relationships than it deepens. In the end, most of the time, we simply grow apart. That's not how the ascension deepens intimacy, presence, and blessing.

The ascension deepens intimacy by giving us precisely a new presence, a deeper, richer one, but one which can only come about if our former way of being present is taken away. Perhaps we understand this best in the experience we have when our children grow up and leave home. It's painful to see them grow away from us, painful to say that particular goodbye, painful to see them, precisely, ascend.

But, if their words could say what their hearts intuit, they would say what Jesus said before his ascension: "It's better for you that I go away. There will be sadness now, but that sadness will turn to joy when, one day soon, you will have standing before you a wonderful adult son or daughter who is now in a position to give you the much deeper gift of his or her adulthood."

Ronald Rolheiser

PERPETUAL PROFESSION OF BR. JERRY EKKA

"He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. Abide in me as I abide in you."

Eternal Father and Mother, creator of all beings, I thank You for being ever present to me through experiences and people revealing Your love and inviting me to abide in You.





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In this journey called life, I feel blessed that You walk with me, in my joys and my sorrows, in my triumphs and my struggles, challenging me to open my heart, cast all cares on You and tread the path in trust, faith, hope and love.

I am grateful for the gift of Your son, Jesus my Brother, who invites me to live life to the fullest, providing opportunities for Your grace to grow in awareness of self. Learning of the zeal with which you have made me, a human of great potential to love freely all of creation and oneself. I thank You for the grace and awareness to embrace and accept the gift of my true self; my vulnerabilities and fears, my sexuality, my gifts and talents, my health and well-being.

I thank You for Your gift of the Holy Spirit, who counsels and guides me through my discernment at every moment of my life. Helping me to be in communion with You, through daily living in gratitude, prayer and acts of compassion.

"Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands."

I Thank You, for the gift of sonship in Baptism, for making me realize, that I am precious and loved, inviting me to extend this experience of Your love and care, for others. A call, that I am happy to have, to be a brother to humanity and all of creation. To receive and share love like that of Jesus.



As I continue to search and deepen my faith, in understanding the call to be a Religious. I am invited to grow in mutual relatedness, to be a steward of mutual sustenance and to develop in mutual collaboration.

I thank the Divine for journeying with me and enabling me to discern and choose freely the call of religious brotherhood, a call "to





be with Him, and to be sent out to proclaim the good news”.

I am grateful, for this gift through the religious family of Blessed Edmund Rice, and I deeply desire to offer my life completely in the hands of God, along with Mary saying *“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”*.



And so, I, **Brother Jerry John Ekka** In the presence of this community and of **Brother Stephen Fernandes** delegate of our Congregation Leader take the vows of **Chastity, Poverty and Obedience for life**, according to the Constitutions of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. I promise and pray, that with God’s grace, I shall keep these vows faithfully.



Jerry Ekka

ANECDOTAL STORIES ABOUT EDMUND RICE

I think our perception of historical personalities can be somewhat skewed. Since we have an awareness of their whole lives we tend to look backwards and attribute qualities to their youth which really only emerged in later life. Our eye is often prejudiced. Since Edmund Rice was Irish we expect him to embody the qualities for which the Irish are renowned. His biographers have emphasised his deep faith, his industry, his concern for the poor and marginalised, and his strong sense of justice. They show how his piety was nourished by his mother, Margaret, and how through her example he brought poor companions home to be taught and fed. The commodious Rice home at Westpark must have been quite crowded at times which already housed his parents, his two stepsisters and six brothers. Not enough has been written of the farmer’s son who joined vigorously in hurling matches about which the natives of Callan were and are still passionate. Nor do we hear of the boy who chased rabbits, collected mushrooms and blackberries and joined in the music, dancing and song at the crossroads. These are pursuits in which every country lad engaged. And there was the seasonal





fishing and swimming in the river.

All this was against a background of persecution, glaring injustice and grinding poverty. True, the Rice family was better off than most but they were very conscious of the grim times in which they lived. Since Catholic priests were outlawed, young lads kept a look out for soldiers when a priest had come to offer Mass or hear confessions in the area. Edmund was only four years old when Father Sheehy, on a trumped up charge, was hanged, drawn and quartered not too far from Westpark. The priest's head was placed on a spike outside the village to act as a deterrent.

The Rice family was better off than most but they were very conscious of the political situation in the country. For three years Edmund stayed with an uncle in Kilkenny city and attended a commercial course at which he excelled. At 17 he joined his uncle Michael who was a successful merchant in Waterford, a thriving port where up to a thousand ships were serviced each year. Edmund took to ship's chandling like a fish to water. The work involved fitting out ships for long voyages. Salted meat, oil, tar, ropes were some of the items required. Great numbers of cattle were kept or bought by Michael to be butchered, skinned and salted. Edmund kept meticulous accounts of all transactions. Although he wasn't a handsome young man, he cut quite a dash. He was tall and robust and notably chivalrous. He was soon introduced to High Society.



It was customary for the better-off class to hold parties, turn about, in each other's houses. The parties involved music and dancing, food and drink. It was a fertile ground for matchmaking. Edmund was a welcome guest on such occasion as he was "a good catch". He was very fond of dancing and he possessed a very pleasant tenor voice. He wasn't slow about coming forward to sing when his turn came. Interestingly it was the time Thomas Moore was collecting his "Moore's Melodies". Tom collected old Irish Airs and wrote English lyrics for them. There were subtle references to Irish national aspirations and many an Irish hero was eulogized in covert fashion. "The Last Rose of Summer" is probably Tom's most famous song, well known to Edmund. Even in later life, Edmund would sing his favourite Moore's Melody at community gatherings.

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There might seem to be some incongruity about a young man attending these soirees and still being present at daily Mass. Obviously Edmund possessed a very holistic mind set. This was very apparent in his place of business. Having concluded a deal with a ship's captain or his representative, Edmund would have his customer kneel and recite the Rosary with him! Most likely Edmund met his wife-to-be at these parties. Mary Eliot's people were tanners and could have dealt with each other over cowhides.

"The decade beginning 1780 was extraordinarily eventful for Edmund Rice, It would alter totally the course of his life..... He would meet, love and marry a well-to-do girl and become the father of a child. He would see the deaths of his wife and his father, and he would experience the anguish of learning that his baby daughter was handicapped. It was a decade which brought equally remarkable shares of business advancement and personal tragedy, and from its mixture of success and suffering, he would emerge a mature man of twenty-eight years with an intention, as yet ill-defined, of dedicating himself to the service of God and his underprivileged fellows." (Desmond Rushe)

The rest of Edmund's story is known to us – how he provided for his daughter, redoubled his charitable works, brought waifs to his home to feed and teach, cared for homeless women, visited prisons, accompanied the condemned to the gallows, became more given to prayer and spiritual reading. Yet we are told that he loved jokes and had a fine sense of humour. We can imagine how he regaled his companions describing to them his first attempts to establish a school. When his first two reluctant "teachers" collected their remuneration they each signed the receipt with an X! A cousin of his got into serious trouble with the law – not a difficult thing to do in those penal days. Edmund shipped him off to Newfoundland concealed in a pork barrel. His association with Poll Carty is well known. Poll was a most disruptive person when drunk – which was most of the time. Many tried to convince her to change her ways as she was a very kind person when sober. Edmund Rice convinced her to take the pledge. Not only that - she agreed to take the pledge in Cork from Father Theobald Matthew himself – the Apostle of Temperance. Edmund outfitted her for the trip which the bold Poll insisted on making on foot. The 150 mile walkathon was dotted with "watering holes" to slake the thirst of weary travellers. The irony wasn't lost on Edmund. When he was an old man Edmund used to be wheel chaired around the garden in Mount Sion by two young Brothers. They weren't very responsible. On one occasion they lost control of the wheelchair which careered down a slope and into the bushes. There was never a word of reproach from Edmund.

Edmund's list of trials was long and painful. He was maliciously criticized by many – even the clergy. There was a falling out with the Bishop, a split amongst his Brothers and the congregation was outlawed by the government. Through these and other trials Edmund maintained, "What is done for God will turn out right in the end." Always seeing the bright side? Providence is our inheritance!

Bap Finn





MRS. ELSIE JOHN



Mrs. Elsie John, Anish's mother, was a very loving and kind lady. She prayed for the Christian Brothers daily. She taught for several years at Carmel School, Malcha Marg, New Delhi and was considered by very many Carmel Alumni as their favourite teacher.

May her gentle soul rest in peace.



VOCATION CAMP 2024

April and May are hectic months for us in the field of Vocation Promotion because many dioceses in India conduct their Vocation Camps soon after SSC and HSC board exams. This year Willie and myself, Theo, Paistar and Lurshai, had a privilege to represent our Congregation in Shillong, Nongstoin, Sambalpur, Rourkela, Berhampur and Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. During these camps we met many young boys whom we invited to step forward to be Religious Brothers in today's world. Apart from the camps we went to Assam, Jharkhand, Meghalaya and West Bengal to meet catholic boys and invite them to be Brothers. So, throughout the year we have collected the names of the boys and kept in touch with them.

This year on 15-18 of May 2024 we had invited boys from above places to our CB Vocation Camp in SMO Dumdum. We started our Camp with 11 boys from Assam, Asansol, Jharkhand and Odisha. On 16th the



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various sessions were looked after by our own Brothers William D'souza, James Joseph and Jayanti Chauhan. During our sessions we emphasised the life of our Holy Founder, Prayer, God's Call and basic tests for selecting the candidates.

On 17th morning we had a session on motivation for a happy life, Video clips of Br. Bipin Dhanvar, Br. Vinod Topno and Br. Ranjeet Kujur in Hindi and Sadri where they shared their Call and life. After lunch we went to the House of St. Mother Teresa

of Kolkata. The last session was taken by Sr. Sanjyoti Kerketta IBVM on God's call and Sr. Eblin Tirkey IBVM did some action songs with them in St. Joseph College, Bow Bazaar. This was followed by dinner and interaction with Brothers in Bow Bazaar.



William D'Souza and Jayanti Chauhan

FORMER ALTAR BOYS AT SACRED HEART, DELHI WITH THE ARCHBISHOP





A Reminder

Brothers, the Pilgrim group is meeting at the ERC Goa on Sat Oct 26th and Sunday Oct 27th, that is the two days prior to the Province Assembly. Accommodation will be available for days after the Assembly. . Kindly contact Walter Vaz should you require accommodation after the Assembly. **(Wilfred D'Souza)**

Poetry Section

The Last Rose of Summer

Oh! had we some bright little isle of our own,
 In a blue summer ocean far off and alone,
 Where a leaf never dies in the still blooming bowers,
 And the bee banquets on through a whole year of flowers;
 Where the sun loves to pause
 With so fond a delay,
 That the night only draws
 A thin veil o'er the day;
 Where simply to feel that we breathe, that we live,
 Is worth the best joy that life elsewhere can give.

Thomas Moore

A Poem by Ruskin Bond

"If mice could roar
 And elephants soar
 And trees grow up in the sky;
 If tigers could dine
 On biscuits and wine,
 And the fattest of men could fly!
 If pebbles could sing
 And bells never ring
 And teachers were lost in the post;
 If a tortoise could run
 And losses be won,
 And bullies be buttered on toast;
 If a song brought a shower,
 And a gun grew a flower,
 This world would be nicer than most!"

Ruskin Bond

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