

Maryknoll Brothers Newsletter



October 16, 2015



JiangMen, Guang Dong- Bishop J. E.

Walsh's First Parish

By Joe Bruener

I was assigned to teach at WuYi University in the southern Chinese city of JiangMen in March of this year. I work in the English Department, teaching English to Chinese College students, many of them are non-English majors. Fr. Tom Wilcox came to this school in 1985, because of his presence the college was elevated to the status of University. Fr Tom was followed by a host of other Maryknollers including Frs. Dugas, Lamazza, Egan, Kilkelly, and others.

Fr. Wilcox chose this part of China to work in because it is the seat of the JiangMen diocese that Bishop Walsh established. Actually it was a parish run by the Paris Foreign Mission priests which Maryknoll took over in 1919. When JiangMen became the center of the diocese, James E. Walsh became the bishop. Br. Albert Staubli constructed the Church, rectory and convent, which still remain after a long brutal Communist persecution. The present Bishop stays at the rectory and when I first arrived in JiangMen I was invited to stay there. It's a very servicable and handsome building of gray brick, even today. The church is simple and beautiful. The Maryknoll Society helped the parish to do some renovation which included new polished granite flooring.

In about 1933 Bishop Walsh established an order of religious sisters to help him in the diocese. They are still in JiangMen today and their main convent is at the parish. They are Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters and the Maryknoll Sisters were their first formators. The first novitiate class completed their studies in 1935 and one of those sisters is alive today, her name is Sr. Pauline Feng and she is 104 years old. She recently fell and broke her hip, but is feeling much better and goes to Mass in a wheelchair. Last Sunday she tried to give me money for Masses. Of course I told her I would have Masses celebrated for her, but she didn't need to pay me. I was humbled when she said, "Oh the Masses are not for me, I want masses for the growth of our parish!".

As a Maryknoll Brother, I feel very close to the 24 sisters who remain. Fr. Tony Brennan MM was a chaplain for them and Maryknoll continues to support them in anyway possible. During the persecutions of 1950-1978, these women remained steadfast in their faith. They have several young women in studies, but as can be imagined, China now offers young women many new and exciting possibilities that weren't available before, so vocations are limited.

Fr. Ray Finch, is planning a visit to JiangMen during his November visit to Hong Kong, as it is only a four hour bus ride from Hong Kong. Please keep this Diocese in your prayers, our 24 Sisters, 8 priests, Bishop and laity all strive to strengthen the legacy of Maryknoll in this, it's first diocese.

Experience Celebration Festival Virgin of Urkupiña

by Ryan Thibert

My Overseas Training Placement here in Cochabamba, Bolivia has been a wonderful experience. I have immersed myself at every opportunity through Cultural Integration, Cultural Immersion, Cultural Education and most importantly, learning to communicate in Spanish. Living here in Cochabamba, I have learned a lot from the Bolivian people, developing a great appreciation and understanding of their culture and customs. For example, I had shared one such experience during a cultural event. I had attended the festival of "the Virgin de Urkupina " In this celebration, the people remember and share their history and religious significance.



There is a massive parade of costume dancers. The fiesta marks a date where repeated visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary were viewed on a nearby hill called Cerro Cota Hill. From my experiences, I am discovering a clear sense of self as a Brother in mission. Mostly, I am learning through immersion by spending time with the people of Cochabamba. I am humbled by the kindness and support which the Bolivian people have expressed and shared with me since I have arrived. I am enjoying the experiences of learning Spanish here at the Language Institute and practicing the language by speaking Spanish every day. For my ministry, I am currently working at an orphanage called "Casa Nazareth" where I am teaching young boys about art through practical hands-on art activities as a form of therapy and self expression. The children express their enthusiasm and joy of learning during these times. OTP for me has indeed been a time of growth and blessings for me.

Nepal

By John Beeching

Glad to learn you got back to the States for the Circus Summit in Springfield -- you've always had such a love of circuses, Frank.

I'm just fine—thanks for asking. Here are a few notes from my journal. . . At the moment, I'm up in Kathmandu with two Maryknoll volunteer ESL teachers, with whom I'm taught for many years both in Thailand and in Egypt. We'll be here for a month doing a program at a local NGO in the area of the city known as Boudha, an area heavily peopled by Tibetans.

This is not surprising since the entire neighborhood centers on a great Buddhist spiritual site, a stupa believed to date back to the sixth century. The 118 foot high stupa, one of the largest in the world, is said to entomb the remains of Kassapa Buddha. The influx of large populations of refugees from Tibet over the past half century, due to relentless persecution, has seen the construction of over 50 Tibetan *Gompas* (Monasteries) in the vicinity of Boudha – the burgundy robed Tibetan monks and nuns form a considerable segment of the area's population, such that the streets around the great stupa are thick with them.

Some four years ago a group of 29 Maryknollers from Asia held an eight day interreligious dialogue colloquium on Tibetan Buddhism here in Boudha with input from a number of Buddhist Rimpoche, monks, meditation masters and nuns from area, and participants visited various monasteries to observe religious rites and rituals. Fortunately, the great White Monastery was holding a nine day *Puja* (Worship service) at the time providing an opportunity to observe rituals not often performed.

The Asia Region holds such colloquiums on the various Asian religious traditions every two years. An earlier one was held here in Kathmandu on Hinduism somewhat similar to the Maryknoll seminar on Hinduism held at Sameeksha Ashram in the South of India.

As might be expected, many of the people in the Boudha area still dress in traditional Tibetan garb, more so the women. All day long, from dawn until deep into evening, an endless stream of Buddhist faithful circle the great stupa

performing what is known as '*Cora*' (meaning, revolution) their left hand fingering the 108 beads mala, while recited the sacred mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum* --Hail to the jewel in the lotus, a reference to the Lord Buddha.

The air is heavy with incense, and the dawn and dusk glow with the light of hundreds of butter lamps all about the base of the stupa, lite with offerings from the faithful. Truly this is a sacred place – one does not need to be told such, for the holiness here is palpable.

Sunday, we were over to a Jesuit scholar's place for mass and had the opportunity of meeting a young scholar from the Kingdom of Mustang. His family has been hereditary leaders of his villages for generations. Presently, he does research shared with a number of Stateside universities on Bon culture, religious practices, language and beliefs. Bon was the ancient shamanistic religious practices which region of Tibet prior to the arrival of Buddhist, and which survive today both as a religion of Mustang, as well as many of the esoteric practices of the so called Tantric Buddhism practiced by Tibetans. In fact, it might be said that it was only through the amalgam of Bon and Buddhism that finally made the new religion acceptable to Tibetans. It is thought that it was the historical teacher, Padmasambhava, a renowned scholar, mediator, and magician, who finally converted Tibet to Buddhism.



While there was extensive damage in Kathmandu from the two recent earthquakes –slight aftershocks are still be felt several times a week--most of the deaths and destruction took place in villages outside the capital. The relief efforts of Maryknoll, directed by Joe Thaler, received praise from the Prime Minister, a real credit to Joe who is now at home in the States for a well-deserved rest.

II

It is not an exaggeration to say Tibetans seem to sense they are born to be holy, and by and large, given to holiness they are—at least, that is an initial impression one has of them. They seem simply to be soaked in sanctity—here in Boudha, from dawn and dusk, vast numbers of the faithful wend their way around the base of the stupa performing what is known as *cora* (revolution) – a ceaselessly, clockwise circling of the sacred site while reciting mantras on prayer beads, or turning the prayer wheels inset round its circumference. A few do so not in the characteristic brisk pace, but by making full-body prostrations every two or three paces. The aura of spirituality at Boudha is so palpable that it is difficult to tell if the air is redolent with the perfume of incense or if it the ‘odor of sanctity’. Actually, in all honesty, incense, when burned by the bucketful, as it is here in the early morning, is nothing less than cloying.

The Dalai Lama made a similar comment about Lourdes while visiting Lourdes. Asked his impression, he replied that it was a very holy place. When someone in the party showing him about asked how he could make such a comment when he knew so little about Christianity, he was quick to reply that he didn’t have to – he could actually feel the holiness at Lourdes.

A few paces back from the perimeter of the great stupa the commerce of everyday life takes over in a ring of shops and restaurants, not unlike the religious good stores and souvenir shops that elbow St. Peter’s and the Vatican a worldly mix of shopping and spirituality.

III

Yesterday, July 31st, was a full moon day, always important as a Buddhist worship Day. Unlike Christianity, which follows the Gregorian solar calendar, Buddhism follows the lunar calendar, as do most other world religions.

This full moon day at the end of July marked the beginning of the so called three month Buddhist lent--*Vassa*-- for the Theravada Buddhists of Southeast Asia, but this practice is foreign to Mahayana Buddhism, as practiced in China, Japan, Korea and Tibet. I was therefore puzzled after the customary sound of the four am wake-

up bell, to hear the drone of chant in what struck me as a somewhat more ceremonious morning *puji*. As I was to learn at a more reasonable hour later that morning, this full-moon day of July coincides with 'Teachers' Day' here in Nepal, an occasion when students Nepal honor their mentors. Since Buddhists rightly regard Gautama Buddha as the greatest of all Asian teachers, it is not surprising then that the *puja* marking the full moon day of July takes on a special significance..

Here in Boudha, no announcement of Teachers Day was needed. The loud peal of the four am wake-up bell was shortly by the deep-throated chant of so many monks that the sound was easily heard even by those still in bed behind closed doors. This steady, deep throat chant, so characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism periodically punctuated by a frightful din of cymbals, drums and blasts from those incredibly long horns played only by Tibetan monks.

Throughout the day the base of the stupa thronged by an unbroken band of worshippers, themselves ringed by a vast sea of flickering butter lamps, not unlike those stands of flickering candles which once kept vigil round the clock in every Catholic Church.

This July, by the way, saw two full moons in one month, an occurrence which takes place only once every three years. This second full moon of the moon is called 'a blue moon', which has given us the expression, 'once in a blue moon'.

The students had put together a delightful program to honor the Maryknoll volunteer teachers of speeches, song and dance. We quite enjoyed it.

Having a free afternoon on Friday, we cross the city to an area known as Tamil, a part of Kathmandu popular with tourists. We did so in the hopes of seeing some of the famous ancient Hindu sites. What with a fine drizzle, it was hardly a day for touring. After a mile or so of trudging along muddy roads, jostled about by a steady stream of motorcycles and other vehicles, we arrived at our goal only to find quite sadly, that a good number of these monuments had fallen victim to the earthquake and were badly damaged. It was a bit depressing, both because of the loss of heritage it meant to Nepal, but by the damage it has done to tourism, at least for the moment.

I chanced into an English language bookstore in the hopes of getting a better bilingual dictionary as a help to teaching and was surprised to see on the rack of postcards, among those of Mount Everest, Hindu deities and ancient Nepali

temples, the one with the simple face of Mother Teresa. Apparently she is still a popular figure here in a countries that counts few Christians, a fact confirmed by yesterday's local English language newspaper which feature an article which made considerable mention of her service to the poor. Here, in what was the last of the Hindu Kingdoms, her memory lingers on.

IV

Tibet due to occupation by the Chinese, affords neither the freedom of contact with Buddhist monks and nuns on the part of outsiders, nor the ability to stay for months, indeed, years on end that Nepal offers to foreigners attracted to Tibetan Buddhism, not to mention the trekking many feel attracted to.

During our short stay here we have met any number of volunteers who seem to have come for what they may have considered a temporary stay, and who are yet here after several years or more.

Many are not so much volunteers as seeker of spirituality, drawn to Tibetan Buddhism by the Dalai Lama and the religions popularity in the West.

We've met several such individuals since coming here two weeks ago to teach. One of them, a Welshman who has graced himself with the title, 'the clown' recounted a fascinating history. Presently, he is teaching a group of Nepali school children and entertains them by blowing up long balloons, which, by twists and turns, he deftly fashions into any number of animal shapes. He is quite accomplice at doing so, having similarly entertain children everywhere from Okinawa to the Khmer refugee camps on the Thai – Cambodia border.



But he is also a serious seeker. He spoke of his years spent practicing meditation in an isolated Tibetan nunnery, where he twice took it upon himself to live an utterly solitary life for three months in cave, the mouth of which had been fronted over to form a crude monastic cell, sparsely furnished with a simple straw bed on the floor along with an open hearth. Not surprisingly, he seemed to have abandoned the concerns of the world to live a life of simplicity, one focused full on the moment – he seemed characterized by a gospel-like, carefree joy. We talked with him for a while, then off he went to blow-up balloons to the delight of youngsters in the school up the lane. He is, to say the least, a rather remarkable man. Were we to stay in Nepal longer, undoubtedly we would meet a whole cast of characters, some undoubtedly drawn here by a land that is exotic and a religion that is esoteric.

A few words from the editor...

I hope that you enjoy reading this issue of the Maryknoll Brothers Newsletter

The next issue will be January 6th, 2016.

Mr. Fernando Perez is responsible for putting together the articles and photos for this Maryknoll Brothers Newsletter.

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