



International Opening of the Continental Mission Year in Asia and Oceania

MAKATI CITY, Philippines - Our mission as baptized Christians is to be disciples who make disciples, and to continue the work of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus sent his first disciples to continue his ministry and share the Word of God across the world. This tradition is still carried on by the missionaries who travel to different nations spreading the Gospel and evangelize people. The work of the missionaries is not limited to a single region, culture, or race. This was also what St. Louis-Marie de Montfort did when he became a priest. Named as "Apostolic Missionary" by Pope Clement XI, he spent the rest of his life preaching parish missions in Western France. St. Louis-Marie de Montfort is known for his "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin", which teaches that having a special and deep devotion to the Blessed Mother is a way to attain union with Christ. Under the guidance of Mary, he preached Jesus Christ, especially to the poor. It was with God and for God alone that he walked the roads of mission. This is the legacy that St. Louis-Marie de Montfort left behind, and it is also how the Montfort Missionaries all over the world continued his mission proclaiming Christ, the Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom, to all, especially to the poor and suffering, leading them to a renewal of Christian life committed to a very special love for Mary.

On this account, the Montfort Missionaries celebrated the International Opening of the Continental Mission Year in Asia and Oceania last January 23, 2022 in Sta. Teresita Parish. Due to the surge of COVID-19 cases and heightened level of restriction brought by the highly transmissible Omicron variant, the authorities banned all forms of public gatherings, including the celebration of the public Mass. It also prevented the General Council, headed by Rev. Fr. Luiz Augusto STEFANI, SMM, and the Superiors of the Asian and Oceanian entities to join us physically in the celebration. The Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Novaliches, Most Rev. Teodoro C. BACANI, Jr., D.D., presided the Eucharistic celebration, together with the Montfort priests in the Philippines headed by Rev. Fr. Norwyn V. BAYDO, SMM. The procession of the

CMY flag and the flags of Asian and Oceanian entities from India, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines, had taken place before the Holy Mass.

Fr. Norwyn officially opened the Continental Mission Year of the Montfort Missionaries in Asia and Oceania. In his opening statement, he said that the celebration of the Continental Mission Year started since 2019 in America, 2020 in Europe, and 2021 in Africa & Madagascar. He noted that the spirit of the Continental Mission Year of the Montfort Missionaries in Asia and Oceania 2022 is revealed in its theme: "Rise and Shine, Montfort in Asia and Oceania". This year is dedicated to empower the congregation through leadership and visibility in the service not only within its own communities but most importantly to God's people. It seeks to strengthen the two continents in walking together in the spirit of the Montfortian brotherhood, as well as to promote the movement to become more open to the possibility of enhancing collaborative efforts among its missionary endeavors. Despite the darkness brought by the pandemic, this animation should serve to encourage us all to rise and shine effectively by participating in the mission to share the Montfortian spirituality wherever we go. The Parish Priest of Sta. Teresita Parish and the Animation Committee Head of CMY in the Philippines, Rev. Fr. Santiago E. CASING, SMM, proceeded to explain the elements of the Continental Mission Year logo.

In his homily, Bishop Bacani emphasized the significance of the word "mission". He said that it was the primary reason of the coming of Jesus Christ, and that He was sent to proclaim the Gospel to the poor and evangelize them. Bishop Bacani pointed out that in order for us to live, grow, and flourish, we must also go to the people and preach the Good News, for life is all about movement. He then recalled the recent incident that went viral on several social media platforms in which he collapsed while presiding over a Mass. When the incident occurred, the bishop was holding the consecrated Host and uttered "Body of Christ" while it was being livestreamed. Despite the difficulties, he was able to finish the Mass while seated. He explained that he felt his knees trembling, which he attributed to the hunger he was experiencing at the time. He admitted that fear had enveloped him and was extremely worried that he wouldn't be able to walk with his weak legs, but with the support and prayers of the people around him, he was able to recover quickly and walk freely again.

Bishop Bacani spoke about the need of not becoming stagnant. Just like what he went through, he was healed not only by helping himself, but also by the love and prayers of those around him. No one is ever sent on a mission alone. In mission, we need to empower one another. As we commemorate the Continental Mission Year, we should be courageous in carrying out our mission just as Jesus sent his disciples to spread the Good News to the people. He also stated that we shouldn't be afraid to continue in doing missionary works because the Lord Jesus Christ has promised us that He will be with us always, and the Blessed Mother is also with us, saying, *"You are my children and I am your Mother. Go as my Son tells you. Go and remain united with Him and you will bear abundant fruit"*. Bishop Bacani concluded his homily by wishing the Montfortian community an abundance of fruit on this Continental Mission Year and may they not only inspire more people to believe in Jesus, but also to encourage them to respond to the call of priesthood and consecrated life.

Even though the General Council was unable to attend the celebration in person, a video message of the Superior General of the Montfort Missionaries, Rev. Fr. Luiz Augusto STEFANI, SMM, was played after the Holy Communion. "Rise and Shine!" This was his greetings and also a message that the Montfortians want to share to everyone in order to proclaim Jesus' incarnation through Mary. Fr. Luiz desires that through the celebration of the Continental Mission Year, we would be able to rise and shine as we face darkness in the world, and

continue to fulfill God's mission to the people. He urged everyone to pray for missionary vocations, particularly Montfortian vocations.

Before Bishop Bacani bestows his final blessing, the Montfort Missionaries Philippine Delegation Council Member, Rev. Fr. Federick B. YUMANG, SMM, led the prayer for the Continental Mission Year. He expressed his gratitude to all the Montfortian communities, mission partners and collaborators, who joined the celebration virtually. He also thanked the community of Sta. Teresita Parish who offered the venue for the celebration and made the wonderful occasion possible despite the fact that it was held virtually. He also acknowledged Bishop Teodoro BACANI for gracing the occasion and presiding the holy celebration of the Eucharist with the Montfortian community. Fr. Fed encouraged everyone to pray and walk in the footsteps of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort and the Blessed Virgin Mary in proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom of God. Towards the end of the Mass, the youth animators and seminarians animated the theme song of the Continental Mission Year, "Rise and Shine" that was composed by Rev. Fr. Willy SELMAN, SMM. We continue to pray for God's zeal in allowing us to fully rise and shine as Montfortians in Asia and Oceania.

Rise and Shine, Montfortians!

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."(Matthew 28:19-20)

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