



Marian Apostolate at D'Hoppe in the Flemish Ardennes

D'HOPPE, Belgium - As everyone would agree, those who serve the faith-communities are duty-bound to attend to the pastoral care of their faithful. Through organizing the processions, the serving priest creates an occasion available for the believers to express their faith and live out their love for God and Mary, our mother.

For simple practising Catholics the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is so significant that they celebrate it with grand joy and preparation. Since the celebration of the feast of the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary in D'Hoppe is linked to organizing a procession in honour of Mary, I had to asked the assistance of the young missionaries in this regard. While Nepo James from Genk came a few days earlier to help me bring the attic in order so that the house is well protected against a heavy winter, two days later came two confreres, Ghislain KASEREKA and Trésor ESAMPELE, from Leuven to help me clear the ways in the park where the procession would be organized. Since the Mass would be celebrated at the grotto, the folding-chairs had to be placed, polished, and arranged for the feast. In the park a lot of pruning had to be done since the bushes have grown big due to the monsoon rain.

Hence, I, together with the two missionaries have cut the grass and made the paths clear for the procession. After that we have also made the grotto proper and cleaned the Stations of the Cross in the park. Our young confreres did their best and happy to follow the spiritual advice of the “ora et labora” of Saint Benedict.

Thanks to our missionaries, everything was well prepared to celebrate the feast of the Assumption on August 15. The Eucharist was presided over by Fr. Jan TACHELET at the grotto and the faithful pilgrims actively participated in it. Fr. Jan emphasized that Mary is our mother in faith, although she is a chosen one among human beings and of all of creation. Although she is a highly favoured one, this did not spare her from experiencing the two sides of life: joy and sorrow, happiness and pain, certainty and uncertainty, trust and fear, faith and dilemma. However, despite these predicaments she remained faithful to her fiat and true to her faith. Hence, she is elevated to be the queen and mother to all who are on the pilgrimage of their faith and now she remains a symbol of hope for all.

On that day, around 70 people, young and old, Dutch-speaking and French-speaking participated in the Eucharist and took part in the procession. This place is located on the border hence most people know both languages: French and Dutch. I am happy to give witness and to write that there are people who come every year from Brussels to celebrate this special day here at our grotto in D’Hoppe. After the Mass, we all walked together in procession carrying the Blessed Sacrament through the park, and after the adoration we have ended the celebration of the feast with the veneration of the relic of St. Montfort. People are much content to see their place of pilgrimage well-maintained by the Montfortians. To let you know, the grotto was recently renovated and the broken parts of it were repaired with the help of the pilgrims who come to pray at our grotto.

Even though the Church and faith are at decline in Belgium what gives us still hope and light are the pilgrim places and shrines. Even in such a secularized country like Belgium, people nourish a loving bond with Mary and come to her shrines to express their love and sorrows by lighting a candle or praying in tears or just sitting at the grotto in silence. Pilgrims have told me how consoled and supported they feel when they take a short walk through the park where the Stations of the Cross are constructed. They have conveyed to me that this park engenders a special tranquility for the heart and the spirit. May their faith be blessed and their loving bond with Mary grow in fruitful living of Christian life and in salvific union with Jesus Christ the Crucified Eternal Incarnate Wisdom.

Fr. Jan TACHELET SMM