

“CALCUTTA, KOLKATA” FORMING FUTURE PRIESTS IN SERVICE

“Potato, potahto, tomato, tomahto...Let’s call the whole thing off.” **Louis Armstrong** performed this ditty in an unforgettable way, but it came to mind as I struggled to say the “new” name of a city I had grown up knowing as Calcutta. Since 2001, its official name is Kolkata, and our own parishioner and seminarian **David Kirsch** spent the better part of January there ministering alongside of the Missionaries of Charity. You may recall that the good people of this parish helped to sponsor him through your generous answer to his call. He wrote back several weeks ago to tell me about his trip and I asked if he might be willing to have me share it with you in my bulletin column. He eagerly agreed. Recall, the seminary is just one of the seventeen ministries assisted by means of the Catholic Services Appeal.

Our seminaries are doing a fine job, especially in terms of forming men for pastoral service. Given the limited time in seminary, I was focusing as much as possible on academics; however, the service component cannot be ignored. In fact, one of our own Latin inscriptions bears witness to this. If you visit the Shrine of Saint Anthony, you’ll see on the face of the altar an inscription that is taken from one of St. Francis of Assisi’s letters. Addressed to St. Anthony, it begins: **Fratri Antonio episcopo meo**, meaning, “**To Brother Anthony, my overseer.**” No, he is not addressing him as a bishop, for he wasn’t one. He was named to be “overseer” of the intellectual formation of the fledgling followers of St. Francis.

Anthony had wanted to be a missionary, but poor health forced him back from his mission in Morocco. But Francis had a new mission in store for him— to be the teacher of the brothers (notice the book he’s holding). But that new assignment came with a caveat. Here is what follows after the salutation above: “It pleases me that you would read sacred theology to the brothers, provided that during the study of it, you would not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion, as is contained in the Rule.”

In other words, Francis did not want the study of theology to overshadow the importance attached to the spirit of prayer and devotion. How correct that is, and not at all “anti-intellectual.” However, it is equally true that there are precious few years in which to study the disciplines of philosophy and theology so needed in ministry. If our men do not study hard, they will soon discover that after a couple of years, they’ll simply run out of things to say! And the faithful deserve better. At the core of any seminarian’s formation is the realization that his call is a call to service. David had an incredible experience of service— something, frankly, that I never had at his age! We heartily support him in prayer. His reflections follow:

My dear fellow parishioners at the Cathedral, and fellow sons and daughters of God, THANK YOU. Thank you from start to finish. Thank you for everything you all have done for me over the past years, and especially over the past two months, to help me to do God’s will and to walk the path of holiness. Thank you for all the prayers that you have outpoured for me as I discerned God’s will, and for all the grace that brought into my life and prayer. Thank you for the love and generosity you have shown me as I have walked this path to the priesthood in difficult times. Most especially, thank you for your (to me) shocking generosity in helping me to follow the Lord to India this past J-term; thank you for entrusting your intentions and needs to me to intercede for you and to carry to Mother’s tomb in Kolkata; and thank you for your eager well-wishes and heartfelt prayers as I made that pilgrimage with you all in my heart.

One day, we were blessed to visit a rural parish in the diocese of Kolkata. When we arrived, we were told that the entire parish was gathered in the church, waiting for us. Of course, our instinct was to rush over as quickly as possible. But the priest insisted that we first sit down and have breakfast! After the 2¼ hour Mass, we were served a second breakfast, and then led to a hall in which the children performed a “Cultural Program,” with a variety of dances and songs, and many “Hearty Welcomes” sprinkled in. Afterward, we walked to visit the houses of some of the parishioners. The best of these houses had two bedrooms (one for the parents and the other for all the children) and a common room. The land was unkempt, and nothing was new. Yet these people were joyful and happy, literally dancing with us when we arrived, constantly asking Father Borello for blessings, offering us their very best hospitality, and delightedly helping us in whatever

way they could. These people, who were living in poverty (though not the squalor of the poor in Kolkata), would have instantly offered us anything of theirs, if they had thought we needed it.

As we left that parish, the sisters and the hundreds of children from the school turned out in force to wave goodbye to us. As I looked at the smiling faces in that jostling and rollicking crowd of children, and at the affectionate smiles of the sisters who had become our spiritual mothers the moment we met them, I was struck deeply by the generosity and love of the Lord, which these people had communicated to me by their delight in welcoming me and my brothers into their parish and their homes. The time I have spent in Kolkata has transformed me. As I continue to pray through the experiences I had there, I will recognize more ways in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit used that time to heal and transform me, and to bring deeper conversion to my heart. God willing, and in Mary's care and guidance, these graces will bear fruit in my life and ministry for the rest of eternity. I will continue to pray for you all. May God bless you all!

In the Hearts of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, David Kirsch

- As you read this weekend's bulletin of March 18-19, I'll be sitting at 11,000 feet, plodding my way towards Mount Everest Base Camp at a slow, steady clip. I'll probably be looking for my yogurt and granola bars, most likely to no avail. You've heard the saying- "When in Rome..." I'd appreciate your prayers- I think I'm going to need them!
- Please spread the word about our **"24 Hours for the Lord"** beginning this Friday at Noon and continuing until Noon on Saturday. Confessions will continuously be heard and Eucharistic Adoration will be held in the sanctuary. The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization produced a 63-page pastoral guide for the "24 Hours for the Lord" initiative. We will have those available in the Church. Join us for an hour of prayer and Adoration.
- On Monday mornings, a dedicated group of ladies gather to care for the altar linens, purificators and clean the sanctuary. They dry dust and wet clean the Sacristy floor. The high altar and pews are dusted and any other surface within reach. This is often painstaking work, but I wish to thank Altar Guild members Kathy Schlangen, Jeanne Eisenbarth, Sheri Lancaster and Mary Schreifels for their service.
- "Breaker Breaker one-nine." Just as the CB radio craze went by the wayside, the Vatican is consolidating its communications operations and has ended its short-wave transmissions, focusing on the internet. Critics say that the short-wave broadcasts were free and reached people even in politically inhospitable countries vis-à-vis the Church.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector