



AUGUSTINIANS  
OF THE  
ASSUMPTION

*Thy Kingdom Come*

Charity No. 233428



The angel said, "Do not be afraid, you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth.... he been raised and is not here... Now go and tell his disciples; Jesus is going ahead of you To Galilee; you will see him there ...." (Mk 16:6-7)

### **When Christ Freed us, He meant us to remain free** (Gal. 5:1)

Many will have witnessed the beautiful ceremony in Westminster Cathedral commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery. No doubt many other ceremonies will have been held to give thanks for that great event in our history, and rightly so.

And yet, we are aware of modern types of slavery: human trafficking, underpaid workers, child labour, child soldiers and many others; situation in which "God is threatened in anyone and anyone is threatened as image of God" to quote our founder Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon. Such slavery is an insult to our God and Saviour who died and rose again that all might be free and enjoy the freedom which comes from belonging to Him. We give thanks to God who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ, with him we triumph over sin and death and look forward to eternal life in Him since through Baptism we share his life. This is the cause of our joy at Easter and indeed at all times. No longer need we succumb to the forces of darkness; nor need we be overwhelmed by the seductive pull of consumerism, hedonism or secularism. Christ, who has overcome the world, in on our side, why be afraid?

May we experience deep within us the abundant joy which remains with us even in times of sadness, or suffering, or even tragedy as we wait

*"with joyful hope for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Roman Missal)

EASTER: Rise heart; thy Lord has risen. Sing praise without delay,

Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise with Him mayest rise:

That as his death death calcined thee to dust

## Home News . . .

### Bethnal Green

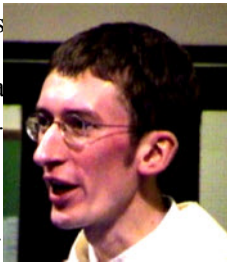
**Jean-Marie Meso Paluku a.a.** arrived to join the community of Bethnal Green in February. Coming from the Congo where he was Privilencial, he is awelcome asset to the Parish

staff, bringing his wisdom and expertise to the community. In his first week here he met the Cardinal and Local Bishop, Bernard Longley.



**Reconciliation...** During Lent the community and parish helped sponsor four ekukenical frefelctions at St Ethelburga's, an anglican foundation set up to explore and encaourage peace and reconiclation between different christian churches and different faiths. The talks (*4 in all*) were led by different Christian leaders. Bishop Bernard spoke about reconciliation in the Catholic tradition.

**Fr Edward Chatov** joined us in 2001 to improve his English and study for his Masters. During his time with us he was ordained Deacon (Hitchin) and later a Priest (Moscow). He has served the Parish of Bethnal Green for a number of



years improving the singing and bringing a mystical sense of the Orthodox traditon to his liturgies. He has been chaplain to the French speaking group of Teams of Our Lady. His great gift to the Region was organising the conferences ovr the last two years with speakers inclduing. Cardinal Luastiger of Paris, the Archbishop of Canturbery, and the Russion Orthodox Bishop Basil among others. Sadly for us Fr Edward will be going to Moscow later in July. His farewell celebration will be on 10th June at 11 a.m. In our Lady of the As- sumption Bethnal Green. All our wel- come. He will be sorely missed

### Hitchin.

Fr. Christopher Burgess a.a. Had suffered a fall, damaging his knee, before Christmas, which kept him at his brother Kevin's for over two months until he fully recovered. Almost immediately after his return he was back in full swing, funerals, visiting the sick etc. Some pa- rishioners thought he looked younger and had returned with a new lease of life.

**Churches Together in Hitchin - New Chair**  
As well as being Dean for a number of years. Father Michael Lambert was elected Chair of the Churches together in Hitchin. Despite having ankle trouble which resulted in his wearing a cast for several weeks, Fr Michael did not miss a

### Saigon, Vietnam: A foundation well under way

#### An apostolic project

Our apostolic project has taken off in two directions. First, we take care of an orphanage that houses children from the streets, aged between six and fifteen. We offer them a proper education and support them with extra-curricular activities.

Secondly, we have responsibility of five foyers that accommodate about sixty students: two for boys and three for girls. These young people are all originally from the country, from very modest families. These foyers are also places of discernment of vocations. Our presence allows these young to pursue their studies to the university level, but also helps them make serious life choices. Our long term aim is to respond to a proposal from the Cardinal of Saigon, Jean- Baptiste Pham Minh Man, to undertake the translation into Vietnamese and the publication of theological and spiritual works to promote Christian formation. *(More information on our website)*

## **CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION – A SAINT IN THE FAMILY**

You may remember that in a recent issue of "The Assumptionist Newsletter" there was an interesting article about the ecumenical work of the Religious of the Assumption at Hengrave Hall in Suffolk. Well, the sisters are in the news again! Only a few weeks ago it was announced in Rome that the foundress of their Order, Blessed Marie-Eugenie Milleret, will be canonized (i.e. officially proclaimed a saint) by Pope Benedict in Rome on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. This is great news for the Sisters and we, the Assumptionist Fathers share their joy whole-heartedly.

Being a canonized saint is about as good as it gets! In footballing terms it's the equivalent of being picked to play for the first team at Manchester United. A saint isn't only recognized as a very holy person, they are proposed to the whole Church as an inspiration and example of how to live the Christian life in its fullness. *"By their fruits you shall know them."* The fruitfulness of Mother Marie-Eugenie's life is evident in the spiritual family which she founded. Today 1,200 Religious of the Assumption can be found working for the Kingdom in 34 different countries.

### ***Family Background and Early Life***

Yet it need not have turned out like this. There was little in Anne-Eugenie (her baptismal name) Milleret's background and early up-bringing to indicate how influential a figure she would become in the life of the Church in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Her middle-class family were not particularly religious, though they went through the motions.

The family split up while Anne-Eugenie was still young and, after the separation of her parents, she lived with her mother. Sadly this situation only lasted for three years for Madame Milleret died in a cholera epidemic in 1830. Anne- Eugenie was only 15 at the time. But her mother's formative influence on her

was very strong. From her example she absorbed the basic values that were to mark the rest of her long life: generosity, self-sacrifice, compassion, simplicity, honesty and courage. After her mother's death she was sent to live with various sets of relatives in Paris, none of whom seemed to have any sympathy for her *loneliness of soul. They matter little to me all these people I meet, the laughter I share, the friends who do not really know me, who greet me without ever*

*thinking to enquire whether I might be unhappy. With them I am more alone than ever."*

### ***A Life-changing Experience***

At this point her life might have settled into a conventional pattern, the sort we are familiar with from the novels of Jane Austen: mixing in fashionable society, the search for a suitable husband, the vocation of marriage and family in a bourgeois setting, cultivation of the Arts and good works, etc. But our heroine was destined for another path. In 1836 when she was 19 years old

Anne-Eugenie went with a cousin to listen to the Lenten Conferences being given at

the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris by a young Dominican priest, Henri Lacordaire who was making a name for himself as an eloquent dynamic preacher.

For the first time in her life Marie-Eugenie heard someone speak of Christ with real passion and conviction. She was like the good soil that was ready to receive the seed of the Gospel. The words of Pere Lacordaire had a profound effect on her. She underwent a genuine conversion of mind and heart. For the first time she realized the beauty of divine truth. It shed a great light on all her ideas, her hopes, her ambitions. For the first time she was captivated by Christ's love and she longed from then on to dedicate her life to working for his Kingdom of peace and justice, love and truth. As she wrote to Pere Lacordaire a few years after her conversion, *"Grace awaited me. Your words gave direction to my ideas; they clarified my thinking and gave me a new generosity and faith that nothing was ever to shake. I was really converted and longed to devote all my strengths, or rather all my weaknesses, to the Church which from that moment I saw as holding the only key to the achievement of good."*

### ***A Brave Venture***

Again her life might have taken a more conventional path; that of joining one of the established Religious Orders. But providence provided another opening.

Only a year after her conversion in 1837 Anne-Eugenie met another young, dynamic, albeit eccentric, priest, Father Combalot. For twelve years he had felt called to found a new religious congregation under the patronage of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven. He saw the education of girls, which at the time was very neglected, as a way to re-Christianise society. In Anne-Eugenie he recognised the foundress with whom he could realise his dream. For her part she was enthusiastic about Fr Combalot's ideas. She too believed that the Catholic fabric of France, torn apart by the Revolution, could only be renewed by a radical reform – of this a key element would be the Christian formation of the future wives, mothers, teachers, and nurses. Though she could not have imagined how, during the next 150 years, women's role in every profession and sphere of society would undergo an amazing development, her far-sighted ideas on the intellectual and spiritual education of young women are just as valid today as they were in 1840!

On 29 April 1839 the new religious family was born. It consisted of four young women living in a flat in Paris and their superior was only 22 years old! Given the total inexperience of the little group and the known volatility of their spiritual guide, what chances did it have of survival? It was indeed a brave venture. It had barely got on its feet when, in May 1841, it was hit by a storm. The man who had been its inspiration and mentor, Fr Combalot, fell out with the Archbishop of Paris and then with the community itself and he left them to their own devices. Nevertheless these founding sisters made their first vows on the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1841. Anne-Marie took the religious name of Marie-Eugenie of Jesus. And in the spring of the following year they opened their first little school for girls. The leader of this brave venture was still only 24 years old and the approval of the diocesan authorities was less than wholehearted. How can we account for its survival?

### ***On Firm Foundations***

The first thing that strikes one is the character and intelligence of the foundress. One has only to look at the surviving portraits and photographs of Marie-Eugenie to see in her steady, intelligent, understanding gaze and smiling generous mouth that this was a woman of unusually strong character, discerning intelligence and warm heart.

Right from the beginning the foundress had a clear understanding of her calling and the vocation of the infant congregation. She wanted it to be in an apostolic community focused especially on education and particularly on the education of her own social class. She set out her ideas about this as early as 1841. *"It seems to me that anyone who loves the Church and is aware of the irreligious outlook of three-quarters of the rich and influential families of Paris, must feel driven to use every possible means to bring Christ into their lives. . ."* She realized that we can only bring Christ to others if one is first possessed oneself by the love of Christ.

The apostolic work of the sisters was to be underpinned by a deep prayer-life. In other words the new congregation was to be both apostolic and contemplative. Its spirituality would be distinctive without being overly based on particular devotions and pious practices. Like the traditional monastic Orders the Assumption Communities would give priority to the Celebration of the Eucharist and the divine Office. To these was added the daily Adoration of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist so that space was given to the individual sisters to deepen their personal relationship with the Lord.

Marie-Eugenie attached great importance to community life as such. Her congregation adopted the rule of St Augustine with its emphasis on fraternal charity. *"Live in a household of perfect harmony, having but one mind and one heart intent on God."* (Rule, Chapter 1) From the beginning the communities of the Assumption were characterized by a family spirit – a spirit of friendship, mutual help, warm concern for each other and a common passion for the great

work of extending the Kingdom of God. All these were the firm foundations laid in the early years of this new religious family.

### ***With the Support of Friends***

Although Marie-Eugenie seems to have been a strong, determined individual quite capable of standing on her own feet, in fact she was often inspired and supported by others as we've seen was the case with Henri Lacordaire and Fr Combalot. Her enthusiasm and passion for Christ's work attracted the friendship and support of like-minded apostles. Two of these in particular were to play a significant role in the development of her life and her work: A young Irish woman, Kate O'Neill and a young Frenchman, Emmanuel d'Alzon. But these friendships and their influence deserve more than a passing mention. *(to be continued)*

## **The Credo of Marie-Eugenie de Jesus**

I believe that we are placed in this universe to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God in ourselves and in others.

I believe that Jesus Christ has saved us to make us free to work according to His Word

It pains me to hear this earth called a land of exile.  
I consider it is a place of glory for God.

I believe that each of us has a mission on earth.  
It is simply a question of seeking how God can use us to make His Gospel known and lived.

I believe that we must do it courageously and by means of faith... the poor means of Jesus Christ, surrendering the success of it to Him.

I believe in a truly Christian society where God, though Invisible, reigns everywhere and is preferred to everything.

To make known Jesus Christ, the liberator and King of the World.  
To teach that everything belongs to Him,  
that He wants to form in each of us  
the great work of the Kingdom of God and wishes each of us to enter into his plan: either to pray or to suffer or to act.

I must confess to you that this is for me the beginning and end of all Christian education

(From a letter written to Henri Lacordaire, undated but between 1841 and 1844)

# And in the Orient . . .

At the end of January Father Arthur Hervet who was in Istanbul came to Plovdiv for a week to meet our community and immerse himself in Oriental spirituality. Before leaving, he said:

*“For me, Plovdiv was a place filled with hope because of the saints who have lived here. I came here afraid, not of being disappointed, but of upsetting this mysterious life that is reemerging. I leave with joy for I have seen Christ on the cross with one arm almost torn off (separated from the body) as if wanting to extend Himself to the whole world.*



*I also took part in the Divine Liturgy. I couldn't understand any of the words, but the divine reality seized me. I rubbed shoulders with very human sisters and brothers, united in radiating the Divine Trinity. I leave with hope that being born and reborn is always possible.”*



**Fr Benoît**

From 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> February our community welcomed the Provincial, Fr. Benoît Grière, for our Canonical Visitation. This passed

## ANNIVERSARY OF EVANGELISATION IN THE BENI-BUTEMBO REGION

(D. R. CONGO) Sunday 24 of September 2006

From 06.00 until Mass at 10.00, people came from Beni-City and the surrounding countryside to the Church of Saint Gustave in Beni-Paida, where hundreds had preceded them, having camped out overnight. Over 25,000 came to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of evangelisation in the Beni-Butembo region of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of



Congo. The Diocesan Bishop Melchisedeck Sikuli, 3 other Bishops, and nearly 400 priests concelebrated the outdoor Mass that lasted over five hours. During his homily, Bishop Melchisedeck said that out of great suffering and simple means, the Diocese had grown from 9,000 in 1929 to 900,057 Catholics today.



Outdoor Mass. With the Sacred Heart fathers, who arrived in 1906, the Assumptionists had a place of honour as members of the Congregation that took over the mission in 1929, providing the Diocese with its first Bishop, Henri Piérard, over 150 Assumptionist missionaries from 8 different countries, and a continued contribution today through the presence of more than 100 religious. At the end of Mass, the Bishop, a representative of the President of the country, the Provincial of the Sacred Heart Fathers, and the Assumptionist Supe-

# **A Gift to be shared**

**An Open Day on Assumptionist Spirituality**

**Saturday 23rd June 2007**

at

**Assumption Priory, Bethnal Green**

10h00 for 10h30 until 15.30

How can lay-people share the Assumptionist way of life and how can they best collaborate in our work for the Kingdom of God? Interesting developments have been happening about these issues in recent years. If you would like to know more about our spirit, why not spend the day

with us at the Priory on June 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Eucharist at 12h30.**

(Lunch provided)

For more information: Fr Tom O'Brien a.a. 02089801968

email: [assumptionists@freeuk.com](mailto:assumptionists@freeuk.com)

Address: Assumption Priory, Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green  
London E2 9PB

*Wishing all our friends and readers  
a Happy & Blessed Easter*

We thank all our benefactors and friends for their continued support and help. You are remembered in our community prayers. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to **"Our lady of the Assumption Vocations Fund"**.

Correspondence: **The Assumptionist, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Herts. SG5 1QS**