

August 2001

Spirititan

NEWS
MISSIONARY

Different Worlds

- Taiwan
- Kenya
- Tanzania
- Paraguay
- Zanzibar
- Brazil
- The Philippines
- Ethiopia

Let the Stories Speak

The Holy Spirit came down on the disciples on that first Pentecost with the stated mission of renewing the face of the earth. But how was this to be accomplished?

How does the Holy Spirit effect this renewal within the Church and throughout the whole human race? How is the mission of the Holy Spirit being carried out today?

This question has been answered throughout the history of the Church by theologians and missiologists. Using the technical terms of their academic specialities they produced explanations that were abstract and theoretical. But their lectures and publications were unsatisfactory, especially to members of a world-wide missionary group such as the Spiritans. Retired Spiritans who have spent a lifetime in third world countries never talk of "mission" in theological terms. They speak only in stories; stories about people and their cultures and their deep religious natures and their search for truth. Unlike the treatises on the subject of mission, these stories have colour, vibrancy, emotion, joy and sorrow.

Recently we received an e-mail from Spiritan Raymond Zimmermann who works in the area of interreligious dialogue in Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean. "In today's world," he wrote, "the idea of mission is best expressed in the stories of missionaries. Their attitudes towards and relationships with the people they live among all around the globe, is the best explanation of the renewal of the face of the earth which has continued without cease since the first Pentecost." No wonder the publication of the francophone Spiritans is called *Pentecôte sur le Monde*.

We felt it was time for an issue of just such stories. So we sent messages to a variety of Spiritans actively engaged in mission, from Amazonia to Zanzibar, from Australia to Zimbabwe, and invited them to tell their stories. The response was overwhelming. We received enough material for at least two issues.

We have edited the material as little as possible, just enough to fit the articles into the space available, because we wanted the voices of the authors to come through clearly. For many, English is not their first language. Very often they work in places far removed from modern conveniences like fax machines and photo developing facilities. Although all are overworked, their dedication to their mission shines through in the articles we present in this first issue of Spiritan stories.



We ask you to read these, not merely to obtain information, but to experience the sense of mission of the authors. Each article will give you a different insight into the great mystery of the workings of the Holy Spirit on earth.

Gerald FitzGerald CSSy

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Learning to Pray in Silence ...

"Be still and know that I am." Psalm 46:10

by Fay Teggart

Confusion led me to the practice of centering prayer. I needed silence and stillness to learn to accept my limitations, to learn that I couldn't achieve peace on my own. I needed to learn to pray with openness to the Spirit.

Centering prayer is a meditative form of prayer influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions. Fr. Thomas Keating, the founder of centering prayer for lay people, describes it as "a contemporary form of prayer of the heart, prayer of simplicity, prayer of faith, and prayer of simple regard." It is one way to facilitate the development of habits that allow us to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Through practice and learning about the false self, one becomes less self-centred and more cognizant of the power of the Spirit in one's life.

I met with a group of others to learn about the practice and to pray in silence. We were encouraged to spend two twenty-minute periods of time during the day in silence. In order to dispel thoughts, a sacred word was to be repeated to regain the experience of no thoughts. After some months of practising this type of meditation, I began to feel psychologically healthier and happier with everyday living. I was not trying to be in total control of every event that presented itself. Two years later I decided to take part in an eight-day intensive retreat to consolidate and reinforce what we had learned in weekly meetings. We would also be instructed about "lectio divina", a prayer method based on scriptural reflection. I underestimated the difficulties in prolonged sessions of meditative prayer, scripture reflection and twenty-four hours of silence. However, the imposed routines taught me the difference between a contemplative

lifestyle and contemplative prayer in daily life.

Now I try to sit alone in silence twice a day seeking a compassionate heart to respond to the others who enter my daily life. I am not called to do great things but if I can be forgiving and loving in little events, like being less judgmental or patient with my husband, I know the Spirit is there to guide. The practice of interior silence brings calmness and joy to the day. Attending to gardening, listening to the calls of the birds or enjoying a walk are occasions to see the beauty in being alive. Centering calls me to be more understanding of the neighbour, the cashier at the grocery store and my in-laws. Often I miss the mark but centering opens my heart to forgiveness.

The practice of centering prayer roots a person into the ordinary routine of daily living. Spirituality is a lived reality. The challenge is to listen to the silence. Contemplation is not just for the mystics but has a

place in all our lives. To quote Fr. Keating:

"I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me." In light of these words, the exercise of compassion does not sound like a big deal. It could mean giving someone a cup of water, a smile, or showing concern to someone suffering a loss. We do not have to wait until we can speak at the United Nations or go to Moscow for a summit conference. Somebody is in need right next door or in our own family, at work, on the bus — everywhere we turn."

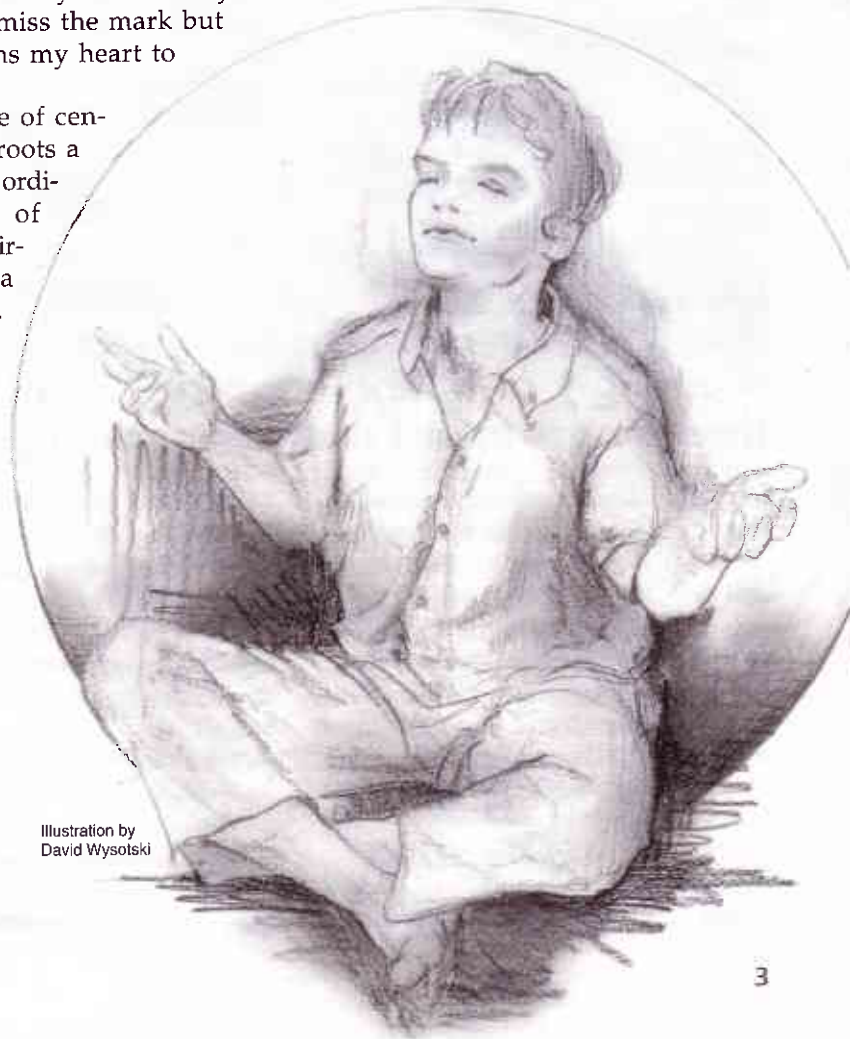


Illustration by David Wysotski



A seed is planted

by Seán O'Leary, CSSp

What did I know of the Orient? I had images of verdant rice paddies climbing, like steps of a stairs, the flanks of mist-shrouded hills. I had images of crowded cities with narrow streets alive with movement, noise and commerce. I had images of friendly, hardworking, smiling people.

But when I touched down on Taiwanese soil, as the first Spiritan ever to be appointed to work on what the Portuguese named Ilha Formosa, the

political future of the people is in doubt as China presses its claims to this off-shore 'province'.

First impressions

I will never forget my feelings of awe and bewilderment as I made my way from the airport that rainy December evening. I was dumb-struck by the neon signs in Chinese characters and wondered to myself if I ever would be able to master such a seemingly complex language. More than three years

practiced tongue to differentiate. This feeling of belonging to a different tribe and different world was further intensified when I sat down for my first lunch at the Bishop's residence. I was given chopsticks with which to eat my food and I wondered how on earth I was going to eat my spuds with these implements. Well, that problem never materialized as the next time I would be seeing potatoes was back home in Ireland, that other beautiful island.

Other lasting impressions were the endless stream of motorcycles, the noise, the pollution and the lack of space. Everywhere seemed so crowded. In Ireland I used to love to go for a leisurely walk, but in Taiwan, venturing out by foot is not for the faint-hearted.

Within a year I was joined in Taiwan by James Sandy from Sierra Leone, Jean-Pascal Lombart and Jean-Paul Hoch, both from France, followed a few months later by Philip Wang of Nigeria. Our multi-ethnic and multi-cultural group represents a typical modern Spiritan team.

For over three years we have been learning to understand the ancient and gracious culture of the people. In the meantime, James works with immigrant workers, Jean-Pascal is chaplain to the team responsible for youth work in the diocese, Jean-Paul is the pastor of a city parish and I have become involved in prison ministry.

I was dumb-struck by the neon signs in Chinese characters and wondered to myself if I ever would be able to master such a seemingly complex language. More than three years later I'm still wondering.

Beautiful Island, I entered a world far more complex than that portrayed on travel posters. I soon came to learn that Taiwan is one of the most densely populated places on earth. More than twenty-two million people, of whom 1.2% are Catholic, crowd this land which has developed in recent years a dynamic industrial economy. Although most have benefited from the 'Tiger' economy in material terms, the cost has been high. The environment has been ravaged, pollution of air and water is a major problem, and the

later I'm still wondering. A huge challenge facing the Spiritans here is the Chinese language, which at the beginning is totally confusing. My attempts to repeat these unfamiliar sounds with my Irish accent must be mystifying to the locals who have to endure listening to their beautiful language being murdered. One such victim was our Bishop with whom I stayed for the duration of my language studies. He had to endure being called "Pigs' Feet" every day as the Chinese words for 'Bishop' and 'pigs' feet' are far too similar for my un-