

ONE MONTH WITH

THE BLESSED

MARTYRS OF LAOS

Authentic Texts for Meditation and Prayer

Selected by Roland Jacques OMI

Translated by James Allen OMI

Jaffna, Sri Lanka, September 2016

Our Newly Beatified:
The Martyrs of Laos

Laos presents to Christianity its “Witnesses of the Faith in the 20th century,” 17 men who died as martyrs between 1954 and 1970: a young Laotian priest, 5 priests of the Foreign Missions of Paris, 6 Oblates of Mary Immaculate – an Italian and 5 French, 5 Laotian laymen. Having been beatified in Vientiane on 11 December 2016, they will be celebrated in 2017: at Notre Dame of Paris on 5 February; in Trent (Italy) on 30 April; and at Belleville (Our Lady of the Snows Shrine, United States) on 17-18 June.

As in times past at Rome or Lyon, the Church was born in Laos from the blood of martyrs. In 2000, St. John Paul II called on Christians to honor the Witnesses of Faith in the 20th century. Responding to this call, Laos presented to the judgment of Rome 17 men, Laotians and European missionaries. The story of their life and their death takes us into the turmoil of World History which, after the Second World War, saw nations of East and Southeast Asia fall into the hands of atheistic communism. These men heroically remained at their posts, faithful to the end to Jesus Christ, to Roman directives and to the ordinary people of God entrusted to their care. Between 1954 and 1970, they were killed “out of hatred for the faith.”

Joseph Tiên, the first martyr, had been a priest for 4 years. When ordered to get married so as to become a “normal citizen,” he made his choice without hesitation: “I obey the word of God on which I have sworn to remain faithful. I am ready to give my life for my Laotian brethren.” Thomas Khampheuane, who was just 16, was ready too. His school teacher states: “Fr. Lucien Galan asked me if there would be any volunteers to accompany him to see the catechumens, but none of the 30 students was willing to go: the danger was obvious. Then Thomas volunteered: he would not let Father go alone into that danger.” As for Jean Wauthier, while returning from a missionary journey to a distant village, he died standing, his bag on his back, a rosary in his hand, after having found protection for his young companions...

These 17 admirable men, who identified with Christ in life and in death, form with Him the foundation on which is built the Church of Laos. On 11 December 2016, this young Church celebrated their beatification – a completely novel event for the country. France in turn will celebrate on Sunday, 5 February, at Notre Dame in Paris, since 10 of her sons have shed their blood for the Gospel, along with the Laotians...

Fr. Roland Jacques OMI

SUNDAY, 1ST of JANUARY

Blessed Joseph Tiên (05.12.1918-02.06.1954)

Until the very last days, Father Tien remained confident. He asked of the Christians "special fervor, special prayers to prevent the catastrophe." On the 22nd of March, he wrote of his joy at being able to continue his school...

The last letter received from him is from the 27th of March. This time our friend is in great distress ... Poor Father! He realized his absolute isolation. The priests closest to his station were typically 7 or 8 days away; but due to the Vietminh persecution, these neighbours had to leave their areas to settle in the plains. There was no way he could go to visit them or be visited by them. The Christians were too fearful to give serious help to their pastor in his distress, were it to last. The cross was laid bare before the first Thai-deng priest, four years after his ordination.

In the end, he remained heroically in place (although as a Thai, he could easily have saved himself at any time).



From April 1953, the usual iron curtain separates Sam Neua from the free world. There was no way to contact him...

*Jean Mironneau MEP, « Abbé Joseph Thao Thien »,
in Bulletin MEP 28, 1955*

MONDAY, 2ND OF JANUARY

Blessed Joseph Tiên (05.12.1918-02.06.1954)

Around 1953, Father Tiên was put in prison. He had not wanted to escape: the French priests had suggested it and several villagers had urged him to do so, but he did not want to. He said: "I was ordained for the Christians; I cannot abandon them. Those who want to kill me, well, they'll have to kill me here." He wanted to live and to die among his Christians.



At the camp in Talang, they put pressure on him a number of times to get married: "If you take a wife, you will be free." He always refused: "I am there for the Christians." Among us, we all understood that: he could not abandon his life as a priest. When they brought him into the village, everyone wished him the courage to remain firm: "You are the Father of the Christians; if you give up, all will be lost. If you hold firm, there will also be some Christians over there." Father Tiên is certainly a martyr, for he shared the sufferings of Jesus. His memory has always been important to us. He is a true model for the Laotian Christians of today who truly have need of courage.

*Testimony of Sipéng, a lay Christian
born in the paternal home of Blessed Joseph Tiên.*

TUESDAY, 3RD OF JANUARY

Blessed Jean-Baptiste Malo, m.e.p. (02.06.1899-28.03.1954)

The Annamite (mountain) range rises in front of the prisoners. The real nightmare begins. We have to cross the mountains with our two patients, climb the steep paths, climb rocks, climb ladders clinging to vertical walls, closely followed by a guard who laughs at our distress. Father Malo shouts for help. In vain.



He can do no more. "God, come to my aid," he sobbed, ready to fall into the void. From then on, he is doomed.

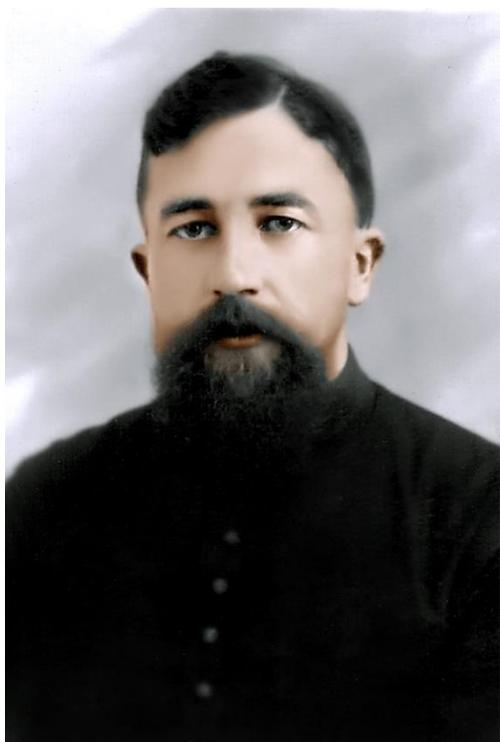
On the 19th of March, Saint Joseph introduces us to "liberated" Vietnam. It's been a year, to the very day, since Fr. Malo, having escaped from China, arrived in Laos! He gets weaker and weaker, aching throughout his worn-out body. He is edifying in his abandon to God: "Yes, yes, yes," he repeats over and over, "yes, my God, as you wish!" But it is the final battle and he feels abandoned by the Father – the disciple, like the Master. He prays for those he loves and for his enemies too.

On the 26th of March, at 7 in the evening, after the agony of a saint, Jean-Baptiste Malo falls asleep in the death of the righteous, the death of a poor man, in destitution and exile, the beautiful death of an obscure martyr, in keeping with his life as one hunted, persecuted for Christ in China, in Laos, in Vietnam.

*Testimony of Louis Mainier MEP on Blessed Jean-Baptiste Malo,
in the Bulletin MEP 28, 1955.*

WEDNESDAY, 4TH OF JANUARY

Blessed René Dubroux, m.e.p. (28.11.1914-19.12.1959)



I gave you your freedom; use it only for the good and the service of your Laotian brothers. I miss your presence very much, even your periods of bad mood; and I miss even more the help you were to my work. This is what I ask of you: stick to regular confession. If you don't go to confession often, you will lose your piety and the purity of your heart; and if, unfortunately, you stop going to confession, that would be a sure sign of disaster.

Now that you have some money, keep track of it, but do not live on the charity of others; and wherever you take a room, try to pay for the room yourself. Any way, you are free, with all the risks that this entails; accept your responsibilities.

My letter contains only advice. Avoid being frivolous; be serious, thrifty and persevering; set fantasies aside. Because you have been faithful, the good Lord has blessed you, and will bless you if you remain faithful. Whatever happens, you will always be my beloved son; I wrote to you at the death of your father that I'm sure he has watched over you from Heaven. The more you give, the more you receive.

*Letter of Blessed René Dubroux
to a young catechist-helper, aged 21, 8 July 1959.*

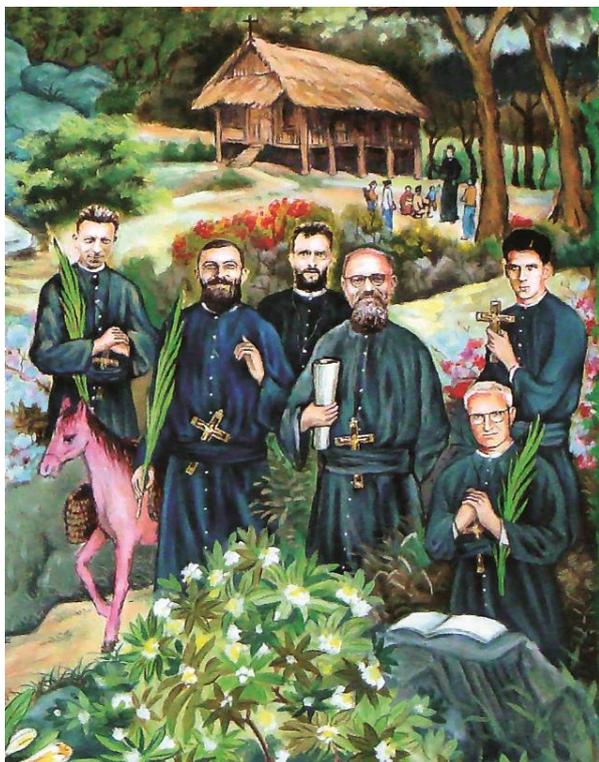
THURSDAY, 5TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Oblate Martyrs of Laos (1960-1969)

Blessed Mario Borzaga (27.08.1932-01.05.1960)

Please accept this brief greeting from the Fathers of the Vicariate of Laos, gathered here in Paksane for our annual retreat. There were 45 of us. This morning, we had the closing ceremony with His Excellency celebrating a Pontifical Mass, along with the renewal of vows and the consecration to the Sacred Heart.

In a few days, we will begin our daily retreat, wherever God wants, always united to Him, more and more as apostles and as Oblates.



Our work sites, whether old or new, close or far-off, await us for a new year of hard work; they hope that we will be renewed in the spirit of sacrifice and in the holiness that God and the Church expect of us.

During this holy retreat, we prayed a lot to the Immaculate Mother of God, that abundant divine blessing might assist and promote your programs for the Mission.

(There follow the signatures of the participants at the retreat, including the six martyrs: Joseph Boissel, Vincent L'Hénoret, Louis Leroy, Jean Wauthier, Mario Borzaga, and Michel Coquelet)

*Collective letter to the Superiors of the Oblates,
written by Blessed Mario Borzaga, 17 November 1959*

FRIDAY, 6TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Mario Borzaga, o.m.i. (27.08.1932-01.05.1960)

In my prayer, I do not ask Jesus for joy or strength; I ask only to love him more and more -- to love him as the saints and martyrs loved him.

And you, now you've begun the Calvary of your apostolate. Along the way, you will be accompanied by Jesus, crowned with thorns; and at the top, you will find him on the cross. The Night will come, and then the Resurrection.

My God, make me love the cross and nothing else. Let me become holy and nothing else, even though I am the last one who should hope for it... O Jesus, be my light, the lamp that brightens my road on this earthly voyage toward heaven.



19/01, feast of St. Mario, martyr. What kind of martyr? Probably nothing more than for the love of God and charity towards his neighbor. I wonder how much I am also a martyr of charity; I will no doubt get there, since from day to night, I must be available to others. To each of those who comes to my door, I say in my heart: "O Jesus, it is you that I love in the person of this poor fellow, my brother; through his suffering, pardon me my sins!"

*Excerpts from the journal of Blessed Mario Borzaga,
1959-1960.*

SATURDAY, 7TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Mario Borzaga, o.m.i. (27.08.1932-01.05.1960)

Each day, we never have any lack of sick people to care for; many hours pass in this exercise of charity and of patience... We are about 15 people here at the mission – Fathers, students and catechists, including women and children – for whom we must provide bread, or rather, their daily rice...



Furthermore, the directives of *Propaganda Fide* require that each missionary spend at least ten days a month among the pagans to evangelize them: that leaves hardly any time for me to rest on my laurels... But working like that is worth it; the Lord blesses our poor efforts.

As far as the war is concerned, our zone is still calm since the opening of the road crossing through our village from Vientiane to Louang Prabang; actually, the rebels stay away from the traveled roads. That having been said, one does sense the odor of danger; so you see our people keeping a watch on the village during the night. As for us, we move forward without fear; we will stop only when the Lord decides. We only need the grace of God. As for the rest, even though our material needs are immense, each day those things seem all the more superfluous.

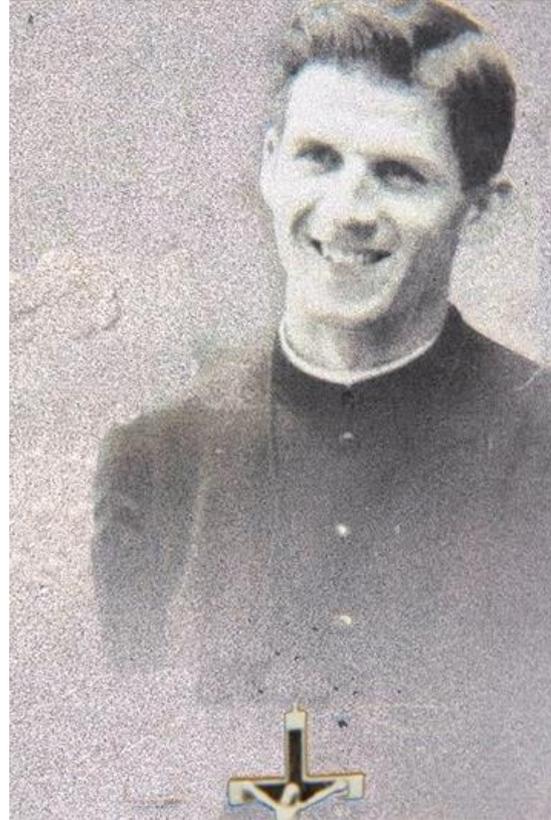
*Letter of Blessed Mario Borzaga
to his uncle, a priest, 6 January 1960*

SUNDAY, 8TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Mario Borzaga, o.m.i. (27.08.1932-01.05.1960)

On November 21, feast of the Presentation of Mary, we consecrated our district to the Blessed Virgin. They tell us that this consecration to the Madonna is an act of despair. So what should young missionaries like us do, faced with such vast territories to evangelize, in the midst of so many dangers and difficulties? So we have decided to “despair” publicly of our own strengths: once more, we recognize that we are poor men; we solemnly declare that we are fragile creatures, feeble voices who cry out in the desert.

So now we are consecrated to Mary: in an act of abandon, we confide all of our worries and our labors – labors that are apostolic only when in the heart of the Queen of Apostles.



We offer ourselves to her so as to become more priestly after the example of Christ. May she watch over us, as over beloved children who, in this region, see her as their Mother, and over all those who don't know her yet. With a little sign from her, we will see her great maternal love: we will be filled with the Grace won for us, won for all, through her infinite suffering at the foot of the Cross of Jesus.

Letter of Blessed Mario Borzaga to the “Friends of Laos,”

Louang Prabang, 1 January 1960

MONDAY, 9TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Catechist Paul Thoj Xyooj (1941-01.05.1960)

One morning, I went hunting in the forest, armed with my crossbow. All of a sudden, I heard voices and very loud shouting. I hid in the brush. On the path, I noticed a group of armed men. They were leading two persons who had their hands tied behind their backs – I recognized the Father and the young lad Xyooj. They stopped; they took the shirts off the two prisoners and forced them to kneel. They hit them with rifle butts while shouting at them from above.

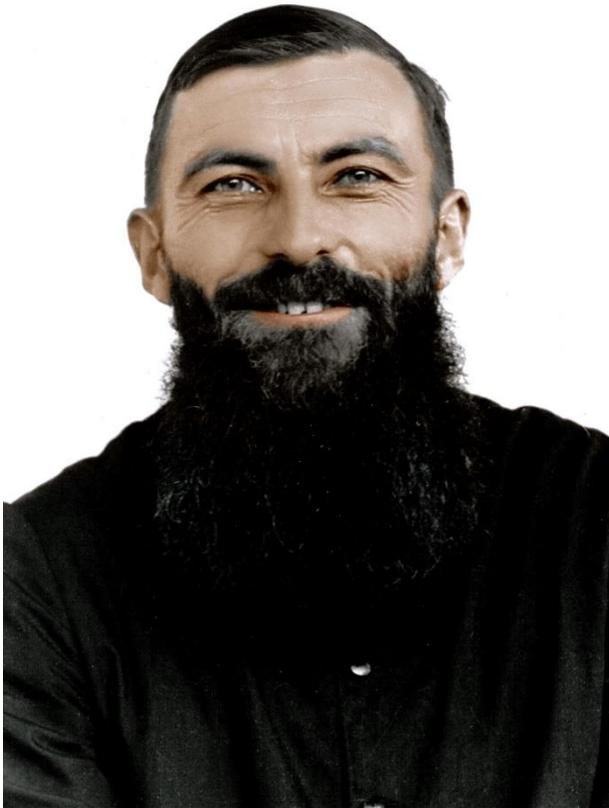


The Father remained silent. Xyooj, who was talking to them and answering them, was beaten all the more, with rifle butts to the head, the ears, the whole body, so much so that blood was running down everywhere. A man cried out to him: “Get out of here quickly!”, but he answered: “No, I am not leaving; I am staying with the Father. If I leave, he is coming with me. If he doesn’t leave, I am staying with him!” The other cried out: “You are responsible for having wanted to bring this devil here and for having converted in one day more than 10 families to follow him.” Then I heard Xyooj praying in Hmong: “O God, protect us and protect our destiny; you see them and you see what they have done.”

*Eye-witness account of a young man
about the death of Blessed Paul Thoj Xyooj.*

TUESDAY, 10TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Louis Leroy, o.m.i. (8.10.1923-18.04.1961)



My impressions of Laos? I am delighted with my obedience, very happy to have arrived in this region and I have only one desire: to work here all my life, and, if God wants, to die here. It is a mission in the strictest sense of the word, a difficult mission, where the Father must live isolated, walking exhausted for days to visit the people, and when he is on the trail, subsisting on a frugal and poorly prepared diet. The people -- all ethnic groups that are in the area -- are friendly. Unfortunately many, one could say the majority, seem scarcely anxious to convert...

What does the future have in store for us? Will the Viêt attack some day? We don't know for sure; we carry on as if the peace will last...

As for me, I am counting on you; pray a little for me so that I might achieve a good knowledge of the language – I am not even close yet. And then, how I need the grace to give myself totally for these people, to overcome the repugnance that the lack of cleanliness and hygiene cause in me! But for grace, we would not last very long.

*Letter of Blessed Louis Leroy
to the Carmelites Sisters of Limoges, 29 January 1956.*

WEDNESDAY, 11TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Louis Leroy, o.m.i. (8.10.1923-18.04.1961)



Among the Christians, we have some who are living their Christianity deeply and who would be ready to shed their blood, if necessary, to profess their faith. A Christian, quite advanced in age, baptized three years ago, told the Father: when I am alone on the trail, I say my rosary to obtain for the Christians the grace to resist the communists if they should invade our country. Besides these beautiful examples, there are some less beautiful ones; the weakness of human nature is found everywhere; original sin has overtaken all of humanity; you notice that quickly, not matter where you find yourself.

Recently, communist propaganda was spreading the rumor that within a year, all the Fathers would have gone back to France, leaving the Christians to themselves; therefore, those who want to become Catholics could not do so reasonably. This propaganda succeeded in troubling some of the people: in that case, it's better to wait before joining that religion. At the same time, we have the joy of being asked for in many villages. Let's hope their request is sincere!

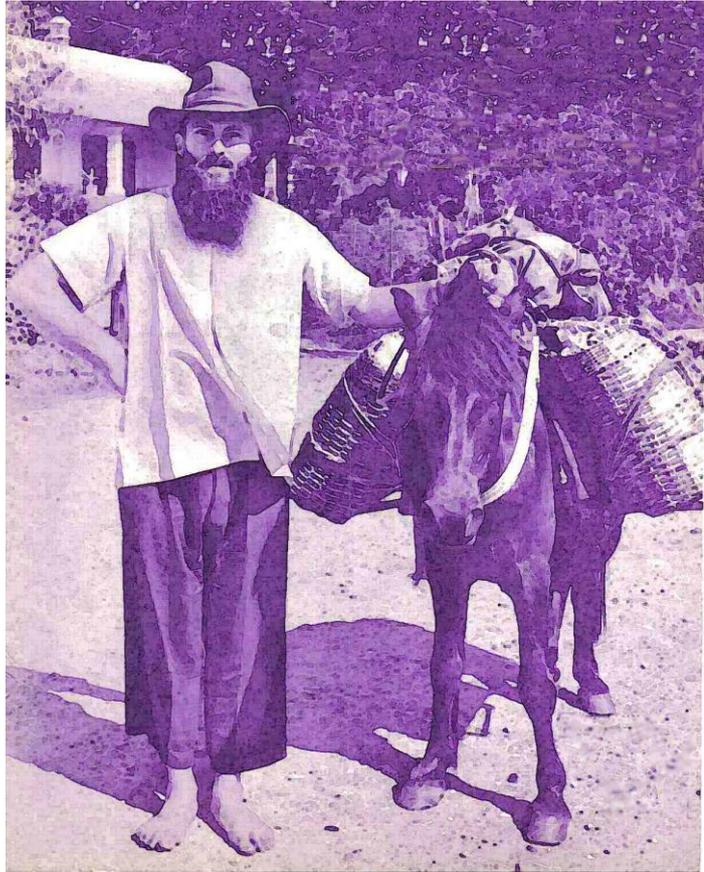
Letters of Blessed Louis Leroy to the Carmelites of Limoges,

2 March and 13 November 1956

THURSDAY, 12TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Louis Leroy, o.m.i. (8.10.1923-18.04.1961)

In the last months, I had the opportunity to spend a night in the pagan villages to try to let them know about our religion, but at least apparently, what I told them did not seem to interest them much. It is the missionaries' duty to preach; nevertheless, he learns quickly that only the all-powerful grace of God can convert a soul. For the past two months, I have traveled a lot; I am alone in a sector that has six villages, each with its chapel where worship is taking place. For some villages, just to get there, one has to walk for five hours, carrying a backpack on paths that go up and come down very abruptly.



Furthermore, we are taking care of two tasks: besides our apostolic work, we must care for the sick. Once Mass is over, I have to care for all sorts of maladies for two hours. How happy we will be once there are doctors in the region! But I think that day is still far off. On certain days, I have more to do than I can, but I am always glad to work for the Good God.

*Letter of Blessed Louis Leroy
to the Carmelite Sisters of Limoges, 14 February 1959.*

FRIDAY, 13TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Louis Leroy, o.m.i. (8.10.1923-18.04.1961)

At Ban Pha, where Father Leroy was, there is clearly religious persecution. The people are terrorized; they have to hide in order to pray. The church and the Fathers' house have been systematically pillaged.... Father Leroy had been searched, stripped completely naked in front of everyone. He had a respite of a quarter-hour which he spent kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament; then he followed the soldiers who pretended that their commander was calling for him: he was in his cassock, his cross in his cincture, his breviary under his arm, bare-footed and bareheaded. They took him into the woods. The people heard gunfire, and now there is a fresh grave...

Fathers Leroy and Coquelet were probably the best religious of the community: humble, zealous, pious, hard-working in studying the language – these greatly compensated for the intellectual slowness of the one (a very late vocation – a Norman peasant), and the shyness of the other.



On the other hand, both were capable of spending entire hours in the church... Their people have come several times already, in spite of the danger, to get news of them. But we cannot give them any.

*Letters of Henri Delcros OMI to his family
concerning Blessed Louis Leroy, 17 May and 2 June 1961*

SATURDAY, 14TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Michel Coquelet, o.m.i. (18.08.1931-20.04.1961)

I am very happy at my first Christmas in the brush. I went to say Midnight Mass in one of our “chapels”, an hour and a half hike from here, but what a hike! First you have to go down a steep slope for three quarters of an hour, and then cross a large river on a sort of a “monkey bridge,” then go for three quarters of an hour up an equally steep slope. Walking that way under a beautiful blue sky and a brilliant sun, through a forest resplendent in leaves and even flowers, I could barely realize that it was the 24th of December! In the village, I heard confessions (in Laotian, a language which the adults know well enough, even though it’s not theirs). After evening prayers in common, some kids kept me company until Midnight Mass.



At midnight, almost the whole village was there, squeezed into the little church of mud and bamboo. Many came back for the Mass at Dawn. After that Mass, I had to take care of the sick; there are always a lot of them, from minor injuries to high fevers, and it’s sometimes disconcerting with the few drugs and the little bit of medical knowledge that I possess.

Letter of Blessed Michel Coquelet to his family,

28 December 1957

SUNDAY, 15TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Michel Coquelet, o.m.i. (18.08.1931-20.04.1961)

This month, we saw our little flock grow: one village (oh, not big: 6 houses, 45 persons) asked me to “chase out the spirits.” Another asked for us for the same reason. There, one can see that it is the grace of the Good God who converts: we didn’t even know of the existence of this last village. There’s a lot of work awaiting us: teaching them and giving them a Christian mentality, something a long way off for them.



“Chasing out the *phis*” (that is to say, to destroy and burn everything that was used for the worship of spirits), that is a big step, very difficult to do, for they have to break away from ancestral customs which many of them hold in high regard...

For us, that is the easiest part. The difficulties start afterwards: toilsome visits to small groups, hidden in really remote places, in holes or in veritable eagle nests in a season when vegetation has overgrown all the roads. And then to teach a supernatural religion to very primitive peoples in a foreign language! The two villages are Phou Theng; now in that language, I am able only to care for the sick, not teach catechism.

*Letter of Blessed Michel Coquelet to his family,
12 September 1958*

MONDAY, 16TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Michel Coquelet, o.m.i. (18.08.1931-20.04.1961)



I cannot hide from you that things are going very badly for Laos. As far as I am personally concerned, I found myself peacefully in my village here, not worrying about a thing, because I had not gone to Xieng Khouang for more than a month. I was getting ready, however, to go up there, when we saw some soldiers arrive here, as well as some women and children who were fleeing the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang. Out of breath, they stopped here to regroup. They settled in a rice paddy, a terrain where a small plane could land to evacuate women and children toward the south. So it is that in four days, the village was transformed into a military camp.

I am absolutely unaware of what is happening in the rest of the country, but you can see that for me, things are not that bad.

Morale is excellent, both mine and that of the people. Once the first emotions have died down, one gets back to business. Even the fugitives don't give the impression of being very upset. So we wait for whatever is next... Strange country, however. So for your part, do not worry: the future is in the hands of the Good God.

Last letter of Blessed Michel Coquelet to his family,

6 January 1961

TUESDAY, 17TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Noël Tenaud, m.e.p. (11.11.1904-27.04.1961)



I am going to settle in the Savannakhet region, and from there, I will move out to find a suitable area to install a station. Meanwhile, I will probably sleep in my van. I don't know yet where I will dwell in the vast region the Bishop has entrusted to me: it must be the size of at least three or four French departments, and, of course, I am alone.... I am not telling you much more about my new kingdom since I don't know much about it. For now, all I ask of you is that you pray and to have the children pray too, as well as all of our friends so that my new field of missionary work be open to grace.

Opening a new region is always a miracle of grace: you must get this miracle for me, and for that, you need to storm heaven for me...

I'm returning from a long, ten-day trip in the area which is my kingdom. I have been in contact with quite a few villages, and everywhere, I was well received. But those are merely first contacts and it's a long way from first contacts to a request for conversion.

*Letters of Blessed Noël Tenaud to his family,
3 December 1959 and 20 February 1960*

WEDNESDAY, 18TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Catechist Joseph Outhay (25.12.1933-27.04.1961)

Outhay was a very fine catechist. He had a strong personality; he was afraid of nothing. He was a faithful companion of Father Tenaud with whom he was traveling. It was while they were traveling that they were arrested. He was a faithful companion of the Church: he devoted his whole life to the Christians, to the people, through Father Tenaud.

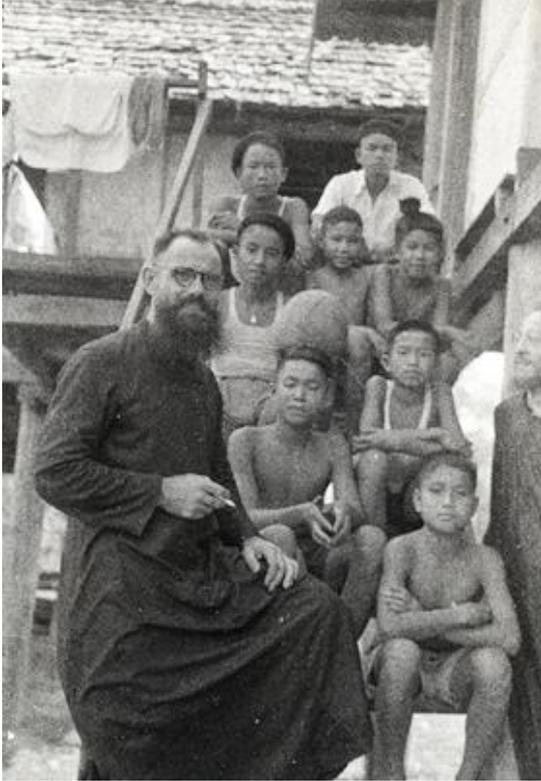
He was patient, simple and humble. He was devoted body and soul to his service as a catechist. He left with Father Tenaud for a village in a disputed and therefore dangerous region. They were ambushed. From the moment that he left for dangerous regions with Father Tenaud, he knew well of the very serious danger, but he never feared for his life. I truly believe that he chose to follow Christ and serve the people of God, whatever should happen. His whole life was directed toward teaching the Word of God, in spite of the danger. Still today, even for those who did not know him, he is a martyr.



*Testimony of a missionary, today a bishop,
about Blessed Joseph Outhay*

THURSDAY, 19TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret, o.m.i. (12.03.1921-11.05.1961)



All the acts of our daily lives, whatever they be, if they are done for love of God and to accomplish the task he has given us, can become a source of supernatural life which will have an effect even into eternity. Ah! If people knew how to understand this teaching of Christ, not only would hell have no reason to exist but even purgatory could be suppressed.

Whatever can happen to me in this country where I am going, I ask of you two things: first, to always pray for me, and second, that you not weep over me.

I am convinced that all will be well and I am leaving full of confidence; furthermore, for the salvation of souls, Christ gave his life; why should it be surprising if God asks the same of one or the other of us?

What is more certain is rather that he will ask us to give our life little by little, drop by drop, in the daily sacrifice of the duties of our state of life... We always have the consolation of being able to join our little daily sacrifices to the great sacrifice of the Cross. We have God with us all day long; what should we fear?

Letter of Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret to his parents,

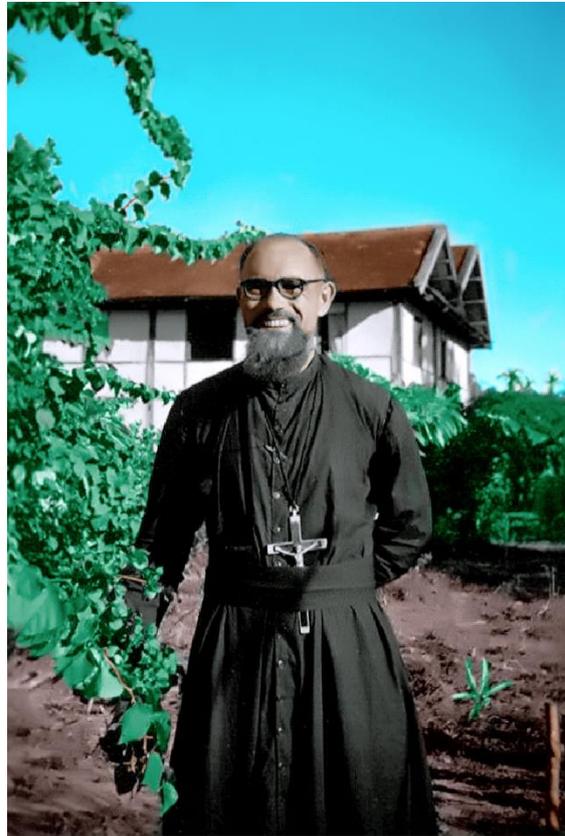
28 September 1947

FRIDAY, 20TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret, o.m.i. (12.03.1921-11.05.1961)

May this year be a year of peace and happiness. In order to possess this peace and prosperity, we must first of all put God in the first place and there is the rest, that is to say all that we need for our daily joy and happiness; then he will give that to us willingly. We must respect his will, in joy and in sorrow and in mourning.

When he wants to test our love, he visits us through suffering of body or anguish of heart; let us tell him thanks in everything and for everything. As hard as it may seem to our nature, we end up by finding our portion of joy, an intimate and sincere joy which makes us always happy.



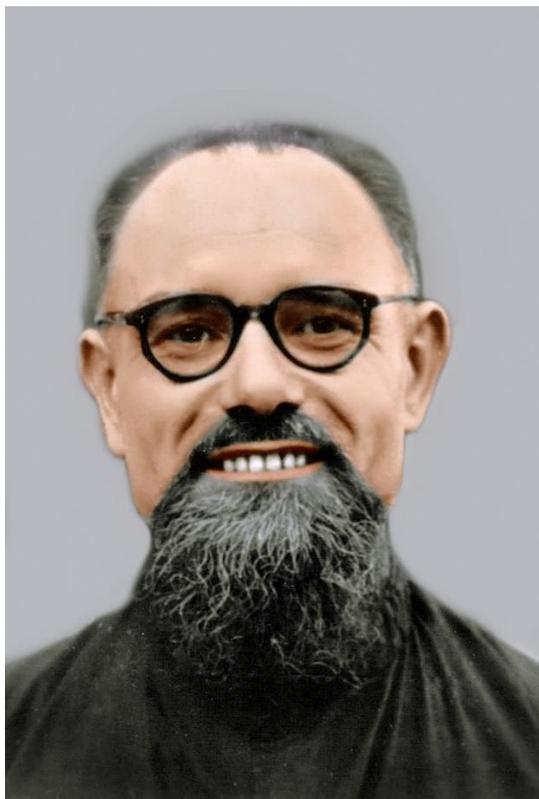
We have faith, a faith which consoles us in the greatest ordeals on earth. God creates us for an end which is not of the earth, but really to go one day to delight in his own joy in heaven; also, the death of the just is a day of joy; it is the child who is going to find its Father. It is under this aspect that we must consider our passing from this earth. This passing is being prepared during all of life.

*Letter of Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret
after the death of his father, 2 February 1953*

SATURDAY, 21ST OF JANUARY

Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret, o.m.i. (12.03.1921-11.05.1961)

The Easter festivities are over. If they wore me out, it was the work I had to do but they caused me a lot of hassle; almost no one came to the celebration, and there were barely a dozen Easter communions. I am awaiting the arrival of the bishop today to make a visit of all the stations.



I don't know what he will decide, but we need to make some serious changes for the people. I believe he is going to put the choice to them: either religion or idolatry.

The Confirmation of the children should be an occasion for us to examine our life to see if we have been faithful to our commitments and if we are grateful to God; if not, let us recommit ourselves to these children under the banner of Jesus and Mary. Our whole life is a perpetual commitment; it is not the activity of one solemn day, but it is every day that we must carry out these commitments, in spite of past setbacks perhaps, in spite of the monotony of daily work, in spite of the routine of our occupations.

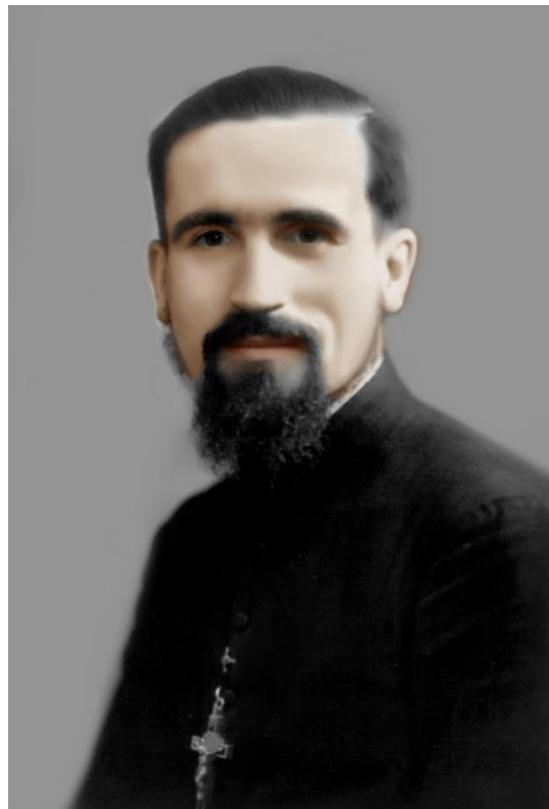
*Letters of Blessed Vincent L'Hénoret to his family,
8 April and 29 May 1960*

SUNDAY, 22ND OF JANUARY

Blessed Marcel Denis, m.e.p. (07.08.1919-31.07.1961)

This year, I discovered some lepers who are forced to live behind a mountain, 5 km straight from my village. I don't want to make a detour of 30 km, on foot of course, to go around the mountain, so I have to climb it: about three hours of acrobatics and moving on all fours over a heap of cutting and burning rocks.

For normal villages, doctors are a problem and a burden. These lepers have never received visits or help of any kind: it will be a crazy adventure, and I cannot leave them like that. There are more than 40 families, all more or less affected ... even children. For the grownups, there are rotting limbs, fingers, feet and hands that fall off, one after the other, ravaged faces. Lots of work and many worries! My life is spent largely on the slopes, climbing the mountains (walking 200 km every month) going from one valley to another, debating day and night in pagan villages, lodging in their homes, teaching Christians and catechumens, healing bodies.



I am only a missionary whose main work is exploring these totally pagan regions.

Circular letter of Blessed Marcel Denis,

December 1957

MONDAY, 23RD OF JANUARY

Blessed Marcel Denis, m.e.p. (07.08.1919-31.07.1961)



Perhaps you've heard that Lak Sao has been taken by the Communists? That was a hot one! ... Once again the Good God protected me. It's only right. People are praying for me so much! Provided that this does not make the bishop change his mind. I don't have a lot of catechumens near Lak Sao; most of my work is in the north...

For years I've been traveling that way, perpetually "reprimanded" by the people who are fearful when there is yet no danger, who still tremble when it's no longer there...

The soldiers are leaving to rest, far to the south, in the mountains, carrying their few wounded, and leaving the region to the Viêt. I stayed to visit my catechumens on Saturday and Sunday. I was able to visit all my people. I am happy. But in leaving, I had a heavy heart, not knowing whether I will ever be able to see again these catechumens of less than a year. Pray hard for them and for the region... So that was an odd week! Pray for your godfather, you and your sisters and everyone...

Letter of Blessed Marcel Denis to his niece,

27 March 1961

TUESDAY, 24TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Jean Wauthier, o.m.i. (22.03.1926-16.12.1967)



The war is in full swing, but here we come and go – sometimes there are impressive encounters. All alone, turning a corner, I come across a dozen armed guys, who immediately take aim at me. A quick act of contrition. With my best smile on my lips, and with a beating heart, I approach them, I speak to them in Phou-teng: they say not a word. Only two answer me in Lao. I tell them that I am visiting everyone to heal them, to tell them of the Good God, etc. Silence... Then I wish them a good journey and without permission I continue on my way. It took me a little will power not to turn around, listening for the rattle of machine guns that I know so well. It happened so quickly, in a forest area where no one will go to look...

You see that the Blessed Virgin protected me. And why be afraid? We are nothing of ourselves, but we are walking Christs; you feel it almost physically in this country where everyone lives in the fear of spirits and we are love, where everyone lives for bodily needs and we are first of all a soul that should be shining, where virginity is unknown and ridiculed and we live without women.

*Letter of Blessed Jean Wauthier
to the Oblates at Solignac, France, 24 March 1954*

WEDNESDAY, 25TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Jean Wauthier, o.m.i. (22.03.1926-16.12.1967)



Less than a two-day walk from here, the Viêt Minh are “catechizing” the people. Humanly speaking, the future is gloomy. Faced with this diabolically relentless deluge, we are 20 Fathers who, conscious of our weakness but strong in the power of God, have decided unanimously at our last retreat to stay, *whatever* should happen. That’s a very weighty little word. We know perfectly well what is going to happen to us: torture and death, physical or psychological torture (who knows which is to be preferred?), the People’s Court, forced labor, expulsion, being broken and belittled...But because our Leader Jesus triumphed over death by dying on a cross, we disciples of his prefer not to have an easy time of it on earth.

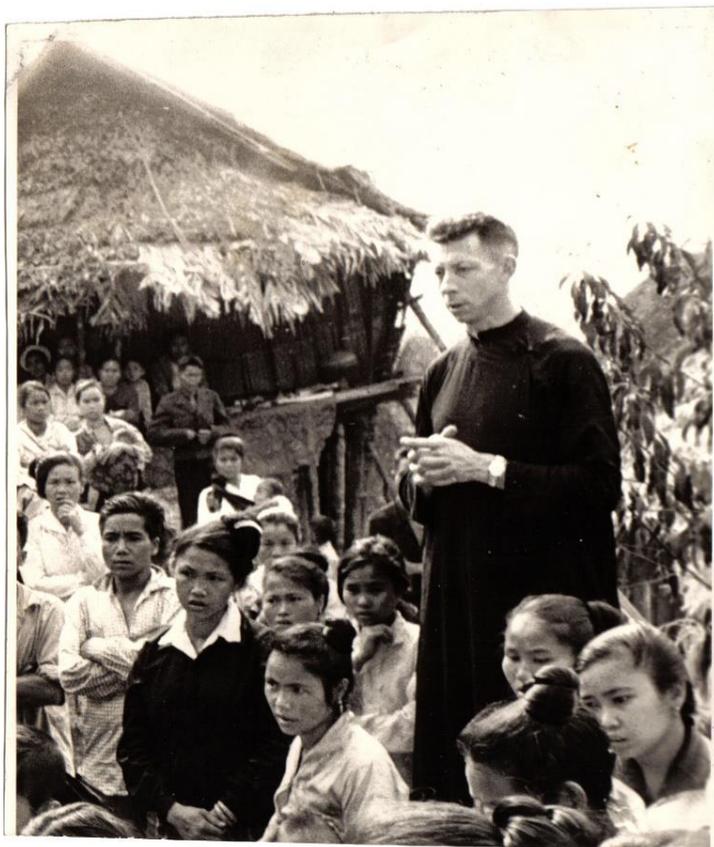
As for the 400 catechumens who are studying: what distress when we think of them! Yet there’s no chaining the Word of God; woe to us if we don’t bring it to those who still languish in darkness... May Jesus and Mary send us Fathers and Sisters; may they give us sufficient health and especially may they not let any of us ever renounce the faith if we enter into the Church of Silence.

*Letter of Blessed Jean Wauthier
to the Poor Clares of Fourmies, 9 December 1954*

THURSDAY, 26TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Jean Wauthier, o.m.i. (22.03.1926-16.12.1967)

The kingdom of God moves forward, little by little, but it's a wonder that it does so, in spite of the huge power of the hostile forces who oppose it... What will be its future? God alone knows, but for us missionaries and for all those who support us, it's consoling to know that the least of our efforts is something positive, even though a road, a bridge, can be destroyed so quickly. That's what I often tell myself while walking along the paths to visit a family that is more or less fervent: a day or two to see four or five Christians, just happy to have any at all...



The other day, I had to cross a river thirteen times, often with the water up to my stomach. After that, I walked in mud for two or three hundred meters on a trail literally plowed up by buffalos. Sometimes it was up to my knees. It's wonderful to get out of there... All of that is the beautiful life of the missionary, really beautiful; nothing beats being wet like the joy of putting on dry clothing; or having walked in the rain for hours and then being in the shelter of a roof that leaks a bit, but not much...

*Letter of Blessed Jean Wauthier
to the Poor Clares of Fourmies, 16 August 1959*

FRIDAY, 27TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Jean Wauthier, o.m.i. (22.03.1926-16.12.1967)



For three years, I have been with the refugees who have gone underground. They fled by the thousands at night, in the rain, in the cold mist of the mountain tops. They hardly brought anything except their children. They prefer to live in the jungle, lacking almost everything, but free. There are times when we need more freedom than we need rice. There are perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 of them.

My family doesn't say anything. They accept it. "They keep these things in their hearts," like all the families of missionaries. That's undoubtedly why their far-off sons can do something. The flowers and the fruits bud forth, but the root is thousands of miles away from there.

As a priest, I am alone. But there are all the people. Because of the war, I live very close to them. It is they who made my house, just like one of theirs: a rectangle of 8 x 6 m (26 x 20 ft.), with a dirt floor, a roof of leaves, walls of bamboo... Often I work with them. They know that I need them for food, for lodging, for protecting me in an emergency. In exchange, when the occasion presents itself, I am the nurse, the teacher, and I try to give them the Lord "always more abundantly."

*Interview of Blessed Jean Wauthier
for the review Famille Éducatrice, November 1966*

SATURDAY, 28TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Lucien Galan, m.e.p. (09.12.1921-12.05.1968)



It's peace that we lack here; there's always war, the little war, not very lethal but awfully bothersome. You always have to be on your guard, armed with patience and prudence. The apostolate is suffering because of it. Yet by seeking, we find souls of good will who are looking for the truth; but we cannot do all that we would want for them. We should not complain too much however; the situation could be much worse. We can still do missionary work and even reap the fruits, not abundantly perhaps, but enough to believe that we're not working uselessly. In spite of everything, we hope for better days. "Fear not, little flock; I have conquered the world."

I am still in the danger zone, surrounded by mines. The jungle inhabited by tigers and serpents is not dangerous, but when men decide to play a game of war there, it becomes dangerous and it's always the innocent who suffer. I am limited in my apostolic or other movements. I am going to spend Christmas in a so-called liberated zone; I'll have to go through the curtain of mines.

*Letters of Blessed Lucien Galan to a priest friend,
12 September 1961 and 16 December 1962.*

SUNDAY, 29TH OF JANUARY

**Blessed Student catechist Thomas Khampheuane
(05.1952-12.05.1968)**

My son, Thomas Khampheuane, born in May 1952, was killed in an ambush at the same time as Father Lucien Galan, on May 12, 1968. A bullet in the head: he died in the field. With another teenager, he was accompanying the Father who was going out to proclaim the Christian faith and say Mass in a mountain village. The guerilla had forbidden movement there and did not want any priest; they detested the priests of the Christian faith.

This was a terrible shock for my family. My wife died of sorrow. I too was troubled and I have no longer been able to teach catechism. The bishop came to see us; he offered some money to compensate us a little for our loss.

Words failed us, but we said no, for it was evident that for us, our son had died for Jesus. In spite of our sorrow, my wife, my daughter and I were in agreement on one point, on the meaning of the death of Thomas: he had given his life for Christ. People told us: your son is lucky; he died with the priest and will certainly go with him to Heaven. That's what we believe too. If one day the Church designates him as a martyr and a saint, my family will be very happy.



*Testimony of the father of Blessed Thomas Khampheuane,
who died a martyr at the age of 16.*

MONDAY, 30TH OF JANUARY

Blessed Joseph Boissel, o.m.i. (20.12.1909-05.07.1969)



Who says that the Fathers are foreigners? Who says that the Fathers are no good? Who says that we are traitors because we profess the religion of the Fathers? Father Boissel lies dead before us, there, right now. His life is the answer to our questions and to our faith. If he is not good, why does heaven not thunder and the plague not gobble him up? Why was he moved with impatience and solicitude to join his children in the village of Hat-I-Et? Only his devotion for his children whom he loved urged him toward them, without thinking about his own blood, his flesh, his life.

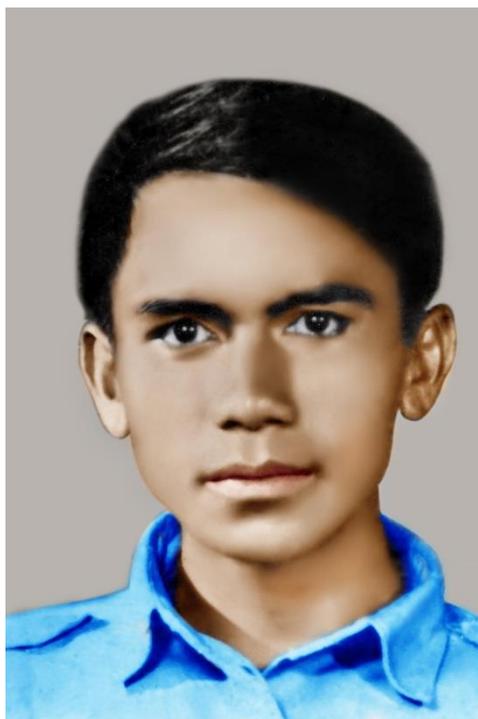
You notables, you teachers who have known and visited Father Boissel, you know and remember that he was a good man, generous with the people and with the poor. Even though he was a man direct in words and who “sneezes loudly,” remember his goodness which he showed wherever he went. “The earth that covers the face for five hundred years cannot make us forget love,” says the poet, for Father Boissel was an example, a source of the love of Christ for us. Neither the rain which falls nor the waters that rumble can erase the bright red blood of Father Boissel which scars this Laotian land.

*Homily of Father Pierre Douangdi OMI
for the funeral of Blessed Joseph Boissel, 8 July 1969.*

TUESDAY, 31ST OF JANUARY

**Blessed Catechist Luc Sy (1938-07.03.1970),
and Blessed Phô Inpèng, layman,
fathers of families (1934-07.03.1970)**

Luc Sy was a catechist who carried out his mission well. Every month, he made a report. Everything was noted: prayers, care and visits of the sick, communion for the sick, baptism of children, marriages, finances. He worked in the mountains, in the “hot” zones. He loved others; he was a man who shared, a helpful man. He made no distinctions between Christians and non-Christians. The day we spent together on the eve of his death, he prayed all day long, from morning till evening without interruption. In the evening when I saw him, he told me: “Now I am ready.”



Phô Inpèng was a new convert who had been a captain in the army before becoming a Christian. His was a family of refugees. He was a leader; he took charge of organizing the little Christian community. Luc Sy took care of the liturgical aspect and he took care of the day to day affairs of the community. I trusted him totally. He really loved God and was proud to be a Christian and a Catholic. He volunteered to accompany us, Luc Sy and me, when the two of them were killed in an ambush.

*Testimony of an eye-witness, a deacon who today is a bishop,
about Blessed Luc Sy and Blessed Maisam Phô Inpèng*

PRAYER

in honour of the Martyrs of Laos

O God, you are the Father of all humankind.

To bring your People in Laos to birth and form them,
you granted Blessed Joseph Thao Tien and his companions,
priests and lay persons,
an unfailing fidelity to Christ the Saviour and His Church,
to the people entrusted to them,
and to the demands of their vocation.

You rewarded their undivided consecration to the mission,
amid countless obstacles,
with the crown of martyrdom.

Grant us, we beseech you,
to imitate the example they set:
heeding thus faithfully to the call of Jesus
and serving the most humble of your children every day of our lives,
we will one day share with them in Heaven
the eternal Paschal Feast.

We ask this through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever.

Amen.

DISCOVERING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF LAOS

The Church of Laos was born of sorrow. Beginning in 1878, some Missionaries of Paris (MEP) and Vietnamese priests went from Thanh Hóa to Sam Neua, in the extreme northeast: in 25 years, 32 of them died, not counting the catechists and anonymous Vietnamese helpers who shared their lot. Father Joseph Tiên, the first martyr of Laos, is their direct successor. In the southwest, beginning in 1885, there was the heroic adventure of ransoming some slaves, a work of the MEP from Siam (Thailand). That's when the first Christian villages appeared along the Mekong River. It was there that the catechist martyr, Joseph Outhay, would be born.

After 1945, with the help of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), who had arrived in 1935, the effort was extended to the many minorities within the country: Kmhmu', Hmong, Lavên... Little by little, they accepted the faith. The blood of their first witnesses, shed for Christ, is mixed with that of the missionaries.

In 1976, all of the foreign missionary personnel left, but also half of the 40,000 Catholics of the country. Most of the Laotian priests were in reeducation camps. And so there was born a Church of the catacombs, cut off from the rest of Christianity. But there is no chaining the Word of God.

Today, the losses have been offset. There are perhaps 50,000 Catholics in a population of 7 million inhabitants (0.7%). In the mid-valley of the Mekong, religious practice is thriving. The Major Seminary of Thakhek is gradually providing priests for the four Apostolic Vicariates. In the cities, Vietnamese migrants bring, together with their ancestral Christian faith, their youth and their vitality. The catechumenate is resuming here and there in the countryside.

Yet the Catholic Church in Laos is still a fragile plant. It is a "Young Church" in the strongest sense; for decades, it has had to rely on its own forces. In the mountain regions and far from the large centers, all Christian religious activity is forbidden. Even the visit of catechists and the celebration of family religious feasts are not tolerated.

Today, a handful of Vietnamese and Thai priests, some Filipino sisters, and one or the other young French volunteer, formed and sent by the MEP, are present to support the Laotians. There are five Oblate priests: four Laotians and a Vietnamese. More than ever, this land irrigated by the blood of the martyrs has need of our prayers.

Fr. Roland Jacques OMI

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