



**Missionary Servants of
the Poor**
Opus Christi Salvatoris Mundi

Ciudad de los Muchachos
San Tarsicio s/n Andahuaylillas
P.O. Box 907
Cusco - Perú
WhatsApp +51 984 807284
e-mail:
pgiuseppcardamone@gmail.com
ayuda.msptm@gmail.com
Web: www.msptm.com

Andahuaylillas, Cuzco, Peru
December 8, 2021

Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary
and last day of the Year of Saint Joseph, her spouse

Dear Friends,

LAUDETUR IESUS CHRISTUS (PRAISED BE JESUS CHRIST)

I take a moment to reflect on this year of 2021 which is coming to an end and has been marked by so many unforeseen circumstances, sometimes painful and difficult due to this pandemic which will leave an indelible stamp on ourselves and our families.

The first thing I want to say is THANK YOU! Thank you for your constant and loving closeness, always concerned about what is happening with us, asking about our health, about what we are doing, about what we and all the children and families entrusted to us need, whether you do so by email, Whatsapp, telephone, or letter. Some of you even came to visit us in Cuzco and Andahuaylillas. In addition, through this year (despite appearances) we felt wrapped in the protective mantle of Mary under the loving gaze of her spouse, Saint Joseph.

We were blessed with the arrival of several young men who want to explore their call to religious life and of a young couple and their two children who want to surrender more to God in the service of the poor.

Our Missionary Servants of the Poor sisters were very blessed with the arrival of several children and babies who were entrusted to them by Divine Providence. Despite the pandemic which continues to be strong in Cuzco, our sisters have not shut their doors to these little ones abandoned by their parents. The pandemic here is so bad that the sisters have had to do without all the physical help from our collaborators for the last two years for the protection of our sick children. However, they have remained sensitive to the needs of all the people and families who have suffered increased poverty.

The thirty sisters who currently live at the Saint Teresa of Jesus Home in Cuzco share the work of caring for the sixty sick and paralyzed children and of the thirty healthy babies, girls, and teenagers. In addition, they are in charge of maintaining the physical plant, the kitchen, the laundry, etc. with the help of the older girls. It is silent and discrete work, united to much prayer and the sacraments (daily Mass and Perpetual Adoration in turns), which are truly their strength and joy.

To receive a child is to accept it in order to give it the love and tenderness of a family. It is to desire to give it the education it needs, material and academic as well as spiritual, to teach it to pray to God, his Father, and to love the Blessed Virgin as the Child Jesus did. It is to receive the Child Jesus Himself, to take Him in one's arms, rock it, and to give it the love that it so needs and lacks.

I must say how excited I was when they told me that two of our boys from the Formation Workshop at our Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto school who have been with us for many years received an award for their academic and professional performance. Armando belonged to the dairy workshop and Hugo to the bakery workshop. I was especially moved by Hugo, who is 21, because thanks to what he learned in the bakery workshop, he has been able to support his mother (widowed for some time) and his six younger siblings. These two young men have become very responsible and professional. I share the joy and pride of Pedro, one of our married missionaries, who is in charge of the workshops.

My thoughts turn to the boys and girls' schools and I am astonished at what the directors, Father Agustín and Sister María Luisa, together with the teachers and married missionaries, have managed to achieve this year. Despite the spread of the Covid pandemic in our communities, the "extern" sisters (who work in the missions and don't go to the orphanage through prudence), as well as the priests and brothers and the married missionaries, have continued the distribution of food to the families of our school children. More than a thousand persons continued receiving every month food, clothing, blankets, and school supplies, all at the risk of contracting Covid. We realize that risking our lives to allow others to survive is really very evangelical.

I am happy to tell you that our Saint Tarcisius Home received seven more boys this year. And I would also like to tell you the beautiful story of Alfredo (not his real name), one of our oldest children. We welcomed him when he was six years old. For more than three years he prayed to have a real family. Alfred, having no mother or father, was able to be adopted. This year he was adopted by a beautiful German family who already had three biological sons. I believe that it was a miraculous answer of the Lord to his prayers. Finally he has a family and three brothers with whom he can spend a real Christmas...and the rest of his life!

But I won't spend any more time on the priests because the sisters and their work in the missions is very interesting too. For example, in Punacancha (a little village near Cuzco but lost in the mountains at 13,000 feet above sea level) a desperate mother arrived leading her son by the hand. She told the sisters that Luis Fernando, 11, had come at the beginning of the pandemic (he lived in Cuzco) with his two little brothers

to live with their grandparents. Sadly, his grandparents had died of Covid and the mother asked the sisters for help, in particular with schooling her son. She didn't feel she could do it being illiterate and speaking only Quechua. Through his contact with the sisters and the other children that they were helping, Luis Fernando learned to pray the Rosary to which he became very devoted and prayed every day. Then he became an altar boy and began serving Mass with Father Carlos, msp, who comes every Sunday and he became faithful to adoring God exposed in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. An interesting detail (and for me an undeniable sign of the Providence and sense of humor of Our Lord) is that the mother is a fervent Seventh Day Adventist. Currently, Luis Fernando prays all the time because he wants to receive the sacrament of baptism, though his family won't permit it. So I invite you to pray for him, and with him and us, for this beautiful intention.

In Cusibamba, another of the sisters' missions, the story of one of the fourteen girls that have lived with them for two years really moved me. This little Rosalía (not her real name) who is now nine years old, was given to the sisters at the request of her mother. Her father was a violent alcoholic. After two years of praying for her parents, her father began to change and began to visit her on Sundays. Her parents have now decided to get married next year. And a very happy Rosalía has just received her First Communion.

Celebrating Christmas in one of our missions is an unforgettable experience. For example, on December 24 of last year in Cusibamba the people followed the procession of the Child Jesus (gently carried by one of our sisters) through the whole village. Then they put him in the manger. Afterwards the sisters and girls who live with them put on a little play followed by a catechism about Christmas and ending with a tasty snack. On the following day, one of our Missionary Servants of the Poor priests celebrated Holy Mass there. And thanks to Divine Providence, they could offer to each of the children a personal gift made by generous hands. There is always a lot of joy during those days.

One day I was listening to Father Carlos, msp, tell us about what he saw and felt when he went on mission. He was impressed to see how the children frequently lived almost totally abandoned. They have no bed and sleep on the floor or, at best, on a sheep skin. They eat only one meal a day (cooked potatoes or corn) and don't go to school. Listening to him I thought of the Holy Family that sought refuge, rejected by everyone, and of the Child Jesus Who was born in a manger in Bethlehem. How many families and children just like them we find in the High Cordillera as well as in the poor neighborhoods of Cuzco. How many abandoned children who don't know God, who lack love and tenderness.

I can't help thinking that, though this time of pandemic is difficult for many of us, it is also (like it was for Joseph and Mary in the manger in Bethlehem) a time given us by God to meditate on our frailties like the frailty of Baby Jesus in the manger. It is a time of grace, an extraordinary time to realize the value of life, of the childhoods of our children, of family life, of the importance of maintaining family harmony (with the help of God), and of its loving unity.

This December 8th, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, will also be the last day of the year consecrated to Saint Joseph. Let's take advantage while there is time of this great gift of the plenary indulgences that the Holy Catholic Church offers us.

Know that every day before the Most Holy Sacrament exposed on the altar, during Holy Mass, or praying the Holy Rosary, all of us missionaries, children and adults, pray for you and your intentions. You are part of our big Missionary Servants of the Poor family.

In the name of the Holy Family of Nazareth, in the name of the Child Jesus, may you and your families receive my blessing along with the graces that you need.

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Holy New Year.



*P. Álvaro de María, msp
Vicario General de los MSP.*

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