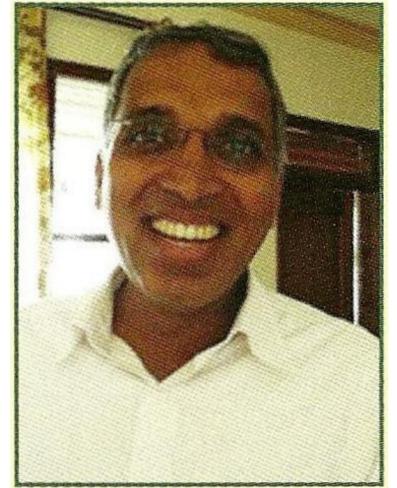


A PATRICIAN'S MISSIONARY JOURNEY IN SOUTH SUDAN

History sometimes puts life in perspective. Stories of despair, poverty, growing up amidst the rubbles caused by massive human tragedies of civil war, make most people resign to that fate, blaming destiny for taking away whatever little they had. Yet, few nations emerge from these surroundings, willing to undertake a journey with a drive unmatched and unparalleled. Very few succeed, though it must be said and the nations that do, ensure that they value it a lot more than those, who might take freedom liberty and equality as a given and for granted. This, by the way, is the story of South Sudan, far from a fairytale. In fact, it is one which lends itself seamlessly to the grand human history - the very indomitable spirit of community and resilience of the people of South Sudan.



Horns of the vehicles in Juba were tooting for joy. The long awaited day - 9 July 2011- will be written in golden letters in the history of the people of South Sudan who have declared this part of the country as an Independent state. Rightly so, the declaration was done at the Memorial Ground of their late leader Dr. John Garang, recognizing the 2.5 million martyrs who shed their blood to win this freedom and recognition as people with dignity and honor. This is truly a nation built on the blood of martyrs. The price that it has paid to win its freedom and recognition of its right for self determination was costly.

People in villages gathered as neighborhood communities on the night of 8 July to celebrate their Passover to the land of Freedom. The elders told stories of their struggle during the long years of war. People poured out their hearts on the atrocities that were done to them by the Khartoum regime. They spoke of experiences of being treated as slaves in their own land. These memories, of their sufferings, are not forgotten. But they called the younger generation to remember it differently. They called the new generation not to fall into the pit of slavery again by disunity, tribal conflicts and mismanagement.

There were songs of joy. People sang loudly that 'God has given us freedom' with lit candles in their hands and started moving their bodies in dance that comes so naturally to all South Sudanese, young and old alike. When the celebration of Passover ended at around 11 PM people gathered in the streets of Juba to express their joy - to shout 'Freedom at last!' Many were moving with open doors of their cars, holding huge flags of the new nation. Some were even somersaulting in joy. There were no on-lookers- all were participants in this expression of their joy that springs from the bottom of their hearts. When clock struck 12.01 on 9 July and there was great rejoicing.

9 July was a special day. Juba would not have hosted so many dignitaries at any one given moment. 30 Heads of States from Africa and delegations of many European and North American governments and 3500 invited guests were present to witness the historic moment. There were Tamil representatives in grateful remembrance of their solidarity to the struggle in south Sudan.

The security reports were forecasting some incidents. Security in charge of an embassy warned some visitors 'no three events in the history of this nation have gone by without an incident. We have lived two - the election last year and the referendum early this year without an incident -so we can expect

something to happen now'. All false alarms were silenced in the way the military, police and the security personnel of south Sudan conducted affairs on that day.

South Sudan surprises everyone. People said the referendum will not happen but it did take place and the people overwhelmingly voted for separation. Everyone feared that the declaration of Independence would not take place but it did take place with International support and shouts of people "South Sudan Oyee" (South Sudan joy). The streets were cleaned up, the pageantry was in traditional style. The deep down joy of the people was felt in their commitment to stay long hours under the scorching sun to see their new national flag fly high and to sing the national anthem with pride and tears.

There are numerous issues that need the immediate attention of the new government. Everyone in S. Sudan is concerned about tribal conflicts. President Salva Kiir spoke some hopeful words "you may be a Zande, Kakwa, Lutugo, Nuer, Dinka or Shiluk, but first remember yourself as a South Sudanese. There will be equal access to existing opportunities for all". That gives some assurance of this wise leader who wants to keep people of more than 150 tribes united. The issue of the identity was the cause of many years of war and it is the challenge of the new nation to create a national identity as South Sudanese.

Almost all foreign dignitaries reminded the new government to attend to the basic needs of the people. Basic needs as access to clean water, medical facilities and education for all are priority issues. Papal delegate, Cardinal Juan from Nairobi, who represented at the Pope at this historic celebration, pointed out three priority areas in his homily at the Cathedral. He said 'Peace Peace Peace', 'Education Education Education' 'Health Health Health' is the primary concerns that should be attended to immediately by the people of this new nation.

We, the members of Solidarity with South Sudan, are happy that these are our priorities too. We are working tirelessly in preparing leaders who will work for peace through reconciliation. We are involved in training of primary school teachers (south Sudan needs 23000 primary school teachers) we are involved in training health personnel - registered nurses and registered midwives (South Sudan has the highest maternal mortality and infant mortality rate in the world). We are very much aware that our contribution is only a drop in the ocean of needs of this new nation. But we are joyful that we can be that one drop that will change the situation for the future of this nation.

It is at St. Patrick's that I learnt what brings happiness to my life: to use my gifts for the good of the community more than for myself, to serve more than loading myself with power, to be happy with what I have more than crave for what I do not have, to share than to accumulate, to collaborate than to compete. It is at St. Patrick's that my call to become a missionary was sown and nurtured. Exposure to the realities of the world by World Mission appeals during the month of October had a direct impact on my call to missionary life.

All members of solidarity feel privileged to be here in this historic moment. We feel humbled by the overwhelming thirst for freedom. We are enriched by their deep spirituality of community and transformed by their simplicity. We share the deep joy of the people of south Sudan and we look with hope

for a peaceful prosperous South Sudan. For, the people of South Sudan know the cost of this freedom, liberty and the possibility to build a new nation on equal opportunity to all. The whole nation prays every day 'we pray in thanksgiving for all those who stood with us in solidarity to bring about peace'. That includes you. South Sudan oye! South Sudan oyee! South Sudan oyeee!

By:

Fr. Y. Callistus Pradeep Joseph CMF

Author's Profile:

Fr. Callistus Y. Pradeep Joseph is a Claretian missionary (Sons of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary) entered the formation program of the congregation in India after completing his secondary school education at St. Patrick's College Jaffna. He was the Head Prefect in Middle School and known to his Patrician friends as YCP. He did his undergraduate studies in Philosophy at Madurai Kamaraj University in India and thereafter his studies in Theology at Loyola School of Theology in the Philippines. He was ordained in 1992 and served as assistant parish priest at St. Patrick's Church Talawakelle in the diocese of Kandy in Sri Lanka. From 1994 he served in various capacities, community animator, procurator, formator. In 2003 he was sent for further studies in the US where he obtained his Masters Degree in Pastoral Counseling. In 2005 the Claretians assigned him to the mission in Germany where he served at the youth centre for over two years. In 2008, he volunteered to work in this Inter Congregational Project "Solidarity with Southern Sudan" (SSS) and was appointed by its board in Rome as the Director of SSS Projects in Southern Sudan. After 5 years of a remarkable and selfless service in the midst of so many odds in South Sudan, Fr. YCP returned to Germany in early 2014.

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela