

(Extract from East Anglia Diocesan Directory 1984, pp 59-61)

OUR MISSIONARY IN PERU – FR. JOHN DRURY

Greetings and love to you all from Parroquia Santa Rose, Talara, on the north west Pacific coast of Peru, just 5° south of the Equator.

I have now completed almost two years working down here, and I welcome this opportunity to share a few reflections with you.

It may interest you to know that no less than twelve dioceses in England and Wales have priests working in South America with the Society of St. James the Apostle, the Society I am also a member of. We are working in parishes in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia.

The question so often asked is why sent priests to the Missions in the 3rd World when there is a shortage of priests in our own dioceses in England and Wales? The question of shortage is indeed a relative word. For example, I work in Talara where the population of 100,000 is 99% Catholic. Half of the population live in two Shanty Towns in the most primitive of conditions.

There are two of us priests of my age (47) and an 84 year old Peruvian priest to look after their spiritual needs, and so often their physical and medical needs too! Or to put it in another way – two priests to look after a city of Cambridge with a 99% Catholic population. At the moment, Cambridge has about a 10% Catholic population.

So the need down here is desperate --- several Popes have appealed to the Bishops of the world to help the Church of Latin America that is now a crucial point in its history. These people are our brothers and sisters in Christ, pleading with us to help them out and not to abandon them.

As you will know from your history, this Continent was sadly abandoned in the past. Our bishop Alan when he visited us in February saw the plight for himself. I quote his words - "I am still vividly aware of having encountered Christianity in the raw, stripped of all embellishment. Equally I encountered great and abiding happiness. I met incredible love and peace in the poorest of the poor, and incredible sharing. But what those beloved poor of Christ in Talara enjoyed sharing the most was their exuberant love".



This was the response to the Bishop's generosity in sending one of his priests (or one of his 'bandidos', as he told the people!) to work in their midst. So to answer the question – real love is to be willing to share the little you have, and not just to give what you have over and above your needs. Our bishop has demonstrated

this real love, and I am certain that this love will be blessed by God in all sorts of ways, and especially with more vocations to the Priesthood for our own diocese of East Anglia and for the Latin American Church too.

Timewise, I am down here for five years. The Bishop insisted on this from the beginning, and with good reason. Oh it is so easy to leave one's heart here with the poorest of the poor! But I respect the Bishop's decision, difficult though it may be. I say this, because I am here in your name; in the name of the Diocese.

Please God, when I return to work in your midst in 1986, there will be another East Anglian priest ready to take my place. In that way, the diocese will continue to show its missionary awareness, and its special contribution to the Universal Church at a very personal level.



I must mention too the unbelievable or 'staggering' response I have received and am receiving from our good people in St. Ives, Cambridge, both places I have worked in, and also from Northampton, where I used to work before the diocese of East Anglia was formed. Our good laity are demonstrating so vividly and positively their missionary sense, and their great desire to be a part of the work going on down here.

This response has been organised totally by them, even without me asking! This fantastic support is enabling us to build boats for our fishermen; new homes for our families washed out in the recent floods; medicines and medical treatment for the poor and educational opportunities for those who will benefit from them most.

Other parishes in East Anglia are now supporting our work... and the 'flame' is spreading. This reassures me a lot, as when another priest takes my place, it will give many other parishes who know him personally the opportunity to get involved at a more personal level in this great missionary work.

1984 is the Centenary of our Cathedral in Norwich. The Bishop has very kindly invited me to return to the diocese for June/July 1984 to share in the celebrations. How I look forward to this, as I swelter away in the desert heat with temperatures well into the 100's! How I look forward too to seeing you all gain.

In the meantime, please keep us in your prayers – we do need them. Be assured of our prayers too.

John Drury