

Kinshasa, October 2, 2004, Feast of the Guardian Angels

My dear friends,

45 years. Today I celebrate 45 years of religious profession. It was October 2, 1959 (I was 20), when at the end of the year of Novitiate (a period of prayer and study and practice of religious life in a community, a period that the Church requires for all those who wish to take the vows) I took the vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty as a Consolata missionary. We were 50 young men of different nationalities (Italian, Canadian, Portuguese, Spanish), it was a sunny day, my parents and my brothers Anthony (already a priest) and Thommy (a seminarian by then, today he celebrates 38 years of profession) were there to support me and celebrate with me.

Two days later I was traveling by train to Rome for my studies of philosophy and theology. My priestly ordination came in 1965, then my missionary service in Italy, Kenya, USA, Congo. But all this was the consequence of the commitment I took that day to consecrate myself to the Lord in the Consolata family by taking the vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty. This is the reason why today I thank the Lord for these 45 years as a Consolata missionary and I wish to share the joy with you and ask you to thank the Lord with me.

And now some news from Kinshasa: In our theological seminary this year we are 18, of five different nationalities. On October 31, four of our seminarians will be ordained Deacons. This means they are in the last year of their seminary formation and they'll be ordained priests after July 2005. This morning, we had the opening Mass of the new academic year at Mazenod Institute, the theological centre of 260 students of theology (men and women) where I teach some Biblical courses and even a course of Italian (to be a pope you need to know Italian because the pope is the bishop of Rome, so we want to give everybody this chance!).

In October I'll take a few days off from teaching, to go to Cameroon with Alphonse and Honorine for the pan-african meeting of Marriage Encounter. In fact I continue to work in this ministry, convinced that helping couples to know and live God's plan for their family is an urgent and beautiful task.

The situation of the country is still delicate, but I notice some small signs of improvement: road works, new buildings coming up, new shops, some new minibus on the roads, the stability of the currency (you can change in the streets US dollars and euros into Congolese Francs and vice versa, the point of reference is usually the dollar; in the shops you can pay in Francs or in dollars). I hope and pray that the situation may improve and that the sufferings of the population may be lightened.

To all of you my warmest greetings assuring you of my prayers and asking for yours, especially in this month of October when we celebrate the World Mission Sunday.

God bless you.

Fr. Mario Barbero