

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear friends in the Lord, greetings from the Rafiki team, especially in this Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany seasons. The team has worked well, tooth and nail, leaving no stone unturned throughout the year 2018 and now, it is looking forward into 2019 with even greater hope and magnanimity. Many times they remained behind the scene, but because of the generosity with which they have offered themselves to the magazine, I feel that they deserve a mention. I am privileged to recognize all the members of the editorial and of the graphics and designs teams; Ayebare Lawrence, Evans Okoth, Bernard Adika, Odong Brian, David Mathenge, John Maro, Nicodemus Mutunga, Chrisantus Norbert and me, plus our fellow novices who continue to file in articles out of their busy schedules, and spare part of their valuable time to write. But the greatest of thanks goes to none other than Head of Graphics and Designs department, Ayebare Lawrence, who has retired. We shall dearly miss him.

In this issue, the *Primi* have finally received their long awaited first mission and have left the novitiate in twos, just as the disciples (Mk:7; Lk 10:1). It is by this characteristic of apostolicity that they identify with the apostolic Society of Jesus. "It is by being sent that the Jesuit becomes a companion of Jesus." (GC 32 #24) This experiment for novices is meant to test, clarify, verify and confirm our vocation. Responding to the call of Our Lord Jesus Christ; "Follow me." (Mt 9:9) and in the Spiritual Exercises the call of the Eternal King or the two standards. (SpEX #136-147)

Furthermore, in this issue you will re-discover the meaning of Christmas as Ayebare has given a personal account, share the love and joy of children and why the Lord said; "Let the children come to me...unless you become like a child you cannot inherit the kingdom of Heaven. On Holy Innocents Day, 28/12/18 the Church remembered the innocent babies who died in Bethlehem at the hands of Herod (Mt 2:16). We were blessed to celebrate a birthday of one of us (Evans) this Advent. How precious to be born in the same month as the Lord! I pray and hope that 2019 is going to be a joyous and prosperous year for us all. May the good Lord bless us and protect us. Happy New Year 2019!

Lawrence and Deogratias



Rafiki



December 2018 Issue

St. Gonzaga Gonza Jesuit Novitiate, Arusha—Tanzania.



A faithful prostrates in prayer in front of a Christmas Crib, a common practice in this season.

Is Christmas Meaningful?

Christmas is here once more. The usual jubiliations are on air and people are busy eating all delicacies, exchanging cards, etc. Everyone has been toiling to see the success of various feasts in this significant season. However, some are indifferent and wonder what this hue is all about; it does not hold water for them. I shudder when I think of this, but it's the plain truth. As I write, I keep on wondering whether I understand the exact meaning of Christmas.

Our world is plagued by all forms of misery: wars (especially in Yemen), poverty, natural disasters (the recent tsunami in Indonesia) and all forms of injustices. I imagine that those who find themselves entangled in all this havoc are helpless and voiceless. Life has probably lost meaning for them, let alone Christmas. They wonder why life is very unfair to them. I'm afraid that we turn our eyes from all this and say in our hearts, "someone will do something for them." We are afraid of beggars and even run away from them even when they don't seem to be approaching us.

If Jesus was to be born in this age, where would he be born? Probably in the heart of Kibera slum in Nairobi or any other shanty settlement in Africa. He would wish to live among the poorest of the poor so that he can redeem them from their plight. When we see these slums, probably we wonder how anyone can live there. But Christ has been living there languishing in untold misery and hoping that someone will lend a helping hand.

We live in a world characterized by a huge disparity between the poor and the rich. The bourgeoisies strive to gain more wealth and end up impoverishing a high percent of the common masses. It is an age when our structures paint richness as success in life. The worth of anyone is no longer equated to one's identity as a human being but with what he/she has or can offer. Human dignity has lost its place. Where are we then headed to? To doom? Some may accuse me of being cynical but I see this as a reality.

How do we respond then? I believe each of us has the capacity to do something, even though it may be termed as insignificant. Let us not behave like the elephants with huge trunks laughing at a bird that is trying to put out fire in the forest with small droplets of water from its beak. Indeed they are huge, but they stand, watch, and laugh at small efforts. One may not be privileged to offer material support, but solidarity with the needy could even mean a prayer for them.

We will grasp the true meaning of Christmas when we offer ourselves to those who need us. Some people are truly wounded and need healing. Others are on the verge of losing hope and need reassurance.

To be on even ground with the teachings of Jesus means putting them into deeds. Otherwise, we remain wanting in the sight of the Creator. God has come to meet us; are we opening the door for him or locking it? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and open, I will come in and dine with him." (Cf. Rev 3:15).

The weight of this matter is heavy and my hands are already full of sweat. I have to put my pen down and ponder on how I can respond in my own capacity.

David Mathenge nSJ

My day with the Holy Innocents

Celebration of life

Elements of Time



Church doesn't hold abortion as an abuse but murder and Vatican II describes it as an abominable crime. The Council further emphasizes that life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception in what my brother Deo emphasized when he once said to me, "Human life begins at conception...it is a human being with a potential, not just a potential human being (*ewtn.com*)."

I am of the view that abortion is inexcusable and I find such an act, for whatever reason, genuine as it might be, as selfish as Herod something St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata had to describe when she said, "If a mother can kill its own child in its own womb, then what is left for you and me to kill each other?" That expressed, I will return to my day with the Innocents.

Annually, 28th of December, feast of the Holy Innocents, the Church remembers the Holy Innocents who died in Bethlehem at the hands of King Herod's soldiers. Well had I been alive then, would I have wished to belong to that number! Then would have had not only the honour of being amongst the first to witness to Christ but also would have had an opportunity of having the highest rank of testifying to Christ; martyrdom. For no one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends (*Jn 15:13*), I guess that's why Jesus had to say, "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than of John the Baptist (*Mt 11:11*)."

Back to us, traditionally the Novitiate either visits St. Josephs Orphanage Center but this year we were privileged to host the occasion. And so right in time the Innocents arrived and the day kicked off with Mass, the first activity of the day. The main celebrant was our very own beloved Fr. Chris Mapunda though one of us, 'His Piousness' Vincent Oluoch, was the preacher of the day. I always thought 'His Holiness Braaza Masenge' was the holiest in the Novitiate. But this man, his gentility in his speech, his pious dispositions at mass that day, as though in ecstasy, and the way his face was shining in those radiant Mass vestments, got me thinking twice. Well, given that I am not good at Swahili, I unfortunately couldn't pick much, but in his sharing I heard a mention of 'abortion' about which I would like to not only share my view but add a voice. Given that we were celebrating the feast of the Holy Innocents who died in Bethlehem at the hands of King Herod's soldiers (*Mt 7:16-18*), I find it an opportunity to share about how our generation, which has taken the place of Herod in the form of all Innocents slain in abortion. Not abused, but denied what's rightfully theirs; life! The

Right after Mass, we divided ourselves in various groups in preparation for programmed activities. This went on till lunch and thanks to our minister, we had enough soda which we made sure that all bottles were empty by the end of the day. So after lunch, we had several presentations from the various groups; songs, games, skits, dancing, cutting the cake... to mention but a few. Finally we concluded with speeches from representatives from both groups and it was time to go freestyle. With respect to age, more sweets and more soda was taken, as others played pool, mini-soccer, watched wasafi, took a walk around the Novitiate, the projects... while the 'refectorians' and 'scullerians' had to run everything to its rightful position. As David's son, king in Jerusalem Qoheleth wrote, 'There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens (*Ecclesiastes 3:1*)', it was time to say goodbye and the novices were left as it was put in the gospel of the day at Mass, "A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Racheal weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more (*Mt 2:18*)."

As for the two in the picture above, they seemed to get along as soon as immediate, connect capriciously, the DNA seemed to have a resemblance, leaving everyone to wonder where the father might be and what he's actually thinking!

Ayebare Lawrence nSJ



I was born in late 1990 when Christmas was Christmas. There would be no Christmas without vigil Mass at a nearby parish, new clothes, loaves of bread in the morning for breakfast, the sweet aroma of Pishori rice for lunch, some tokens from a relative from the city for a liter of Fanta orange Soda, and, dare not forget, a good number of chapatti for dinner. I know the stew guys are about to ask about it. It is obvious that chicken were all over the village and slaughtering a goat would call for a haram-bee. The philanthropist would slaughter it, anyway, and share it with the poor folks in the community.

Terrorism was something unheard of. It was all calm and the non-believers could sense some sort of difference in their disbelief. It was peace all over.

I look around now and I see things have changed! Almost every household can afford bread, rice, chapatti, and a quarter kilo of meat. Pepsi is in the market competing with Coca-Cola and this has made soda even cheaper and the culture of buying new clothes is nearing its extinction.

Let me focus on other elements of change, lest I be accused of being a lover of food. Education beyond secondary school was meant for a few who had 'brains' and means to go beyond this level. Taking your son or daughter to a university connoted superb genetically matched couples. I am astonished by the number of both private and public universities all over, not forgetting the colleges, vocational and technical training centers. The amount of resources being invested in this field by parties of good-will is something that should remind us of the past village fundraisings. A degree obtained as a result of these fundraisings was termed 'village degree' where the entire village had a great deal of expectations about the graduate. To some extent it had a positive result as we could see some of the beneficiaries of the village fundraisings taking back some goodies for development purposes. Looking at the present, the cost of educating a child is left to the sole struggle of the parents and the governments. A good number of students produced here emerge to be self-centered who will do anything to get it all for themselves. No giving back!

Anyway, change is inevitable, they say. Birthdays those



days were celebrated once, that very day you are born. Ululations (not exceeding 5) were the major expression of joy. If you are lucky enough, the next celebration would be marriage if God gives you life. Mind you, death celebration is done in your absentia. These days birthday anniversaries are celebrated every year and I am lucky to have celebrated my 28th birth anniversary on 3rd of

Okoth Evans Okoth nSJ

December 2018 with my companions here in the novitiate.

Advent: A Time of Patient Waiting, Hoping and Loving



THE MISSION

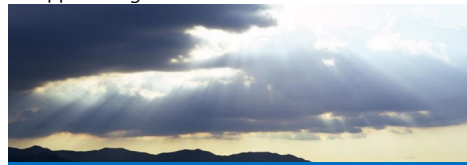
Upon entering this Advent Triduum I rather was filled with a lot of lamentations; "why in the first place do we actually have to have it! How the Sunday-Chefs are going to cook? Yet I wasn't amongst them! How are the 'refectorians' and the driver going keep in prayer while shopping? Yet still I am neither.....!" Even amidst all that, God surely never runs out of surprises.

And so day one I was requested to recall to mind the blessings I have received throughout 2018 (*SpEx #234*) so that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things (*SpEx #233*). It was indeed a joy, full of memorable moments at which I marveled. An opportunity to actually remember that I am God-parent to little Damian back in northern Uganda, and so I had to say a prayer for him. It was an opportunity to hear God call out to me again as I asked, "How can I repay the Lord for all the good done for me?" And He seemed to answer, "The Cup of salvation, you will raise, you will call upon my name! (*Ps 116*)" But on the one hand it was a moment of tears and sobbing at what St. Ignatius would describe in his letter to Simon Rodriguez, "that Ingratitude is the most abominable of sins." The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want, Fresh and green are the pastures where He gives me repose, near restful waters He leads makes to revive my drooping spirit! (*Ps 23*) But what is my spirit drooping; anger, resentment, turmoil of thoughts... though amidst the storm I am patient that it will calm down (*SpEx 321*), on the other hand I am too blind to see, too deaf to hear, too insensitive to feel, I don't hold onto Him but rather busy myself with other distractions...nevertheless, He still stretches out His hand to me like to Peter drowning in the sea (*Mt 14:30-31*). At some point He seemed to sing to me, "Loving can hurt sometimes", as Ed Sheeran would put it in his song entitled photograph. He offers me what is obvious in my sight but I still don't want it, I reject Him. He guides me along the right path, He is true to His name so if should I walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear, You are there to with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort (*Ps 23*). Jesus invites me to trust him more, as in words of St. Faustina Kowalska, "Amidst the worst difficulties and adversities, I do not lose inner peace or exterior balance, and this discourages my adversaries. Patience in adversity gives power to the soul." In my passion, all pain and hurt is comfort! No heart gets hurt in my heart!

Day two was as one would put it when one said that he or she is making an election (*SpEx #169*). It was a moment to embrace what the director would describe as "hard stuff", like that which was said to Mary, "Behold, you will conceive and bear a son... He will be great and will be called son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (*Lk 1:31-33*)" and to understand what a cross it was that weighed on Joseph (*SpEx #263*). It was also a moment to understand what formation meant, that "Whenever the vessel of clay he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making another vessel on whatever sort he pleased (*Jer 18:1-7*)" One would wonder if at times things don't go as expected. But in the light of God, He is continually recreating and remolding us to fashion us into His image. We are indeed like clay in God's hands, in the process of turning into a durable and beautiful vase. We are God's work in progress. And so attention is on taking 'moulding' as 'formation', the focus is on 'being moulded' and not on 'what comes out,' because my eyes can't see that but God the moulder, the potter sees that.

But in the end, 'I am His handiwork, created in Jesus Christ, for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that I should live in them (*Eph 2:10*).' And so it was a moment to feel the call that Mother Teresa would describe as, "It was a call within my vocation" and a Deja-vu feeling of Zechariah pointing out to me as He did with the baby John the Baptist, "And you little child, you shall go...to make known to His people their salvation through forgiveness of all their sins... (*Lk 1:68-79*)." It was a moment of understanding, an 'all knowing but ever-present God (*Ps 139*)' and to marvel at his choices; "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak... (*Jr 1:4-9*)"

Day three, final as it was, was rather an exciting one. It was a time for me to feel what an honour and a joy it was for Elizabeth to receive Mary as she was when the prophet said, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring glad tidings, announcing peace, announcing salvation (*Is 52:7*)." And indeed she uttered out to her, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! (*Lk 1:39-56*)" So as she uttered out her magnificat, I, on the other hand, would chant, "O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor haughty my eyes, I have not gone after things too great nor marvels beyond me... (*Ps 131*)" as my own. It was a moment of great reality that the mystery of the Incarnation did not just unfold and come to an end some two thousand years ago but rather it unfolds every day. How is it that the Divine Majesty deigns to look at the circuit of the earth, and behold all nations in great blindness, going down to death... (*SpEx #101-106*) and, in particular look, at me?! But unlike Miriam (*Nm 12:1-16*) He doesn't unleash his fury upon me as at just that moment I speak against His servants, but rather each time He draws out a plan for my salvation, namely the Holy Incarnation and He seeks me out to the right path, and draws me (*SpEx #108*). It was also a moment to look on the other side of the coin; that in as much as the Angel Gabriel was humble enough to address himself to a mere creature that would rank higher than him as he carried out his office (*SpEx #108*), it was also indeed an honour for them to say out to the Mother of God, "Hail, favoured one! The lord is with you..." and indeed his role in the mystery of Incarnation would have his name praised forever down the generations. It was also time to take a walk, imagining the novitiate to be Bethlehem, I enter alongside Mary and Joseph towards Manresa as the first inn. Then reaching Manresa, the minster says to us that unfortunately there is no room; the same for the block masters and finally to our very own cowshed...the greatest of things unfold in lowliness, and indeed love ought to manifest itself more in deeds and actions (*SpEx 230-231*). And, finally, the review of the Triduum and considering how all good things and gifts descend from above (*SpEx #237*), with tears of joy and gratitude I concluded with St. Rupert Mayer's 'suscipe', "Lord, let it be as you want, any time you want, anytime you want..." But as someone would put, "the graces of this Triduum would be invalid if we didn't thank the retreat director, Fr. Joseph Mboya, and so applauses go out to him!"



Ayebare Lawrence nSJ

GENESIS 12:1-5; "Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing.

'I will bless those who bless you:

I will curse those who slight you.

All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you.'

So Abram went as Yahweh told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had amassed and people they had acquired in Haran. They set off for the land of Canaan, and arrived there." (The Jerusalem Bible)

The *Primi* too have been in such uncertain situations as regards to their second long experiments; the first having been the Spiritual Exercises. Going into the second long experiments, we have been missioned to different places for a period of two months. Some have left their own country, land, relatives, and all have left the novitiate community that is family to all, like Abraham our father in faith, with utmost obedience and faith as that of Abram. Let us now trust in the Lord our God, for what he has in plan and be patient to see what that is. I will be here to share with you what my experiment was like and where I went. Until next time, bye bye!



OLOWO DEOGRATIAS nSJ



Will I write resolutions for this year?

others might remain indifferent to the whole issue. But ask me why I have not written them down and my answer is quick and clear; writing is one thing and implementing is another. I imagine someone is already smiling at this. Indeed many have had resolutions which they have achieved but still others have never realised them. An entrepreneur might attribute this failure to lack of five aspects abbreviated as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time bound). A pious religious will conclude that one never prayed enough and so he/she could not achieve what had been laid out.



Today is the first day of 2019. As expected, many have been swept by the wave of elations and hullabaloo that always usher in any new year. Even though I am glad to have crossed over to this year, I'm unmoved by all this hue. My response is just interior gratitude. Many have expressed their sentiments on how the previous year fared. For some, it was a fruitful year while others term it difficult. On my side, the past year presented me with a variety of encounters all of which I label significant. Already, several have expressed their optimism that 2019 will have a good package. I'm hopeful too. However, can anyone influence or manipulate the events of this year to his/her favour? I wonder.

Is there cause for worry if I did not accomplish my last year's resolves? Not at all! Nobody is therefore justified to label me a failure. This is the time to hold onto the start marks and begin the chase once more. It's a moment to seek help from the right source. Maybe, I cannot achieve these decides without the input of someone. However, I may be skewed more to mistrust and fear and thus be wary of others. A challenge throws itself – put off whatever pulls you back! No pain no gain. Where I hail from, people are fond of saying, "*Ngai aguteithagia witeithetie.*" Translated directly it means, 'God helps you only when you help yourself.'

year. There is a talent to unravel, a vice to uproot, and a reality to confront. Unpleasant circumstances are also there to face but this lures me to mimic an ostrich; bury my head in the sand and assume that everything is fine and there's no danger. And the end? Reality will come banging on the door!

I'm still hesitant to jot down my new year resolutions. Maybe some might wonder why, while

So what? I ponder and keep on wondering. I already have several questions roaming in my mind. Can I improve this, or change that, or even attain that virtue? I believe that every person has something that he/she may want to realise this

I'm already holding my pen and my notebook. I feel compelled to highlight my resolutions. I can achieve them if I believe. Why then shy away? A long journey starts with a single step. This expedition needs a good layout, determination, and absolute trust in God. However, I need to recollect myself and listen to my interior self because it's only by being sincere to myself will I know what I really need. I truly don't want to write resolutions for formality's sake but to my benefit. Additionally, I'm desirous of seeking the help of the Holy Spirit in this matter for He is clear and truthful.

David Mathenge nSJ

Formator's note



As we mark the commencement of the New Year, each one of us, I believe, has certain resolutions for he needs to attain. However, as the days pass by we realize that time is moving too fast and the amount of work is augmenting limiting our options to letting go some of the intended targets to be achieved. Hence, each moment we have to wrestle with time, apostolate and our obligations as religious, however, the most important of all is to strike a balance with regard to

how we use our time, do our apostolate and fulfill our obligations as religious. This has been a challenge to most of us, but let this year be different: by pushing ourselves to the limits to accomplish each and every resolution we have made for ourselves—since the year is still young. Let us 'girdle our loins' and instill in ourselves a sense of self-discipline and abnegations for the sake of that which we admire and desire to achieve.

Fr. Christopher Mapunda, SJ