



Habari Za Hekima

|| A Newsletter of Hekima University College Jesuit Community

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The Children's Catechist

- Alain Christy Ininahazwe, SJ

Since October last year, I have been attending St. Austin's Parish, Msongari where I have been assigned as a catechist. Founded by the Holy Ghost Missionaries in 1899, the parish is still being run by them. For nearly three years, the parish has accepted to welcome a "French-speaking community". These are mainly people from French-speaking countries who need a place to worship and pray where they can attend Mass and other Catholic prayer sessions in French. St. Austin's offered them a place, transformed into a chapel, where they organise themselves every week. From this initiative, many other things were put in place for this community to maintain their faith. Thus, for the young people, they have created a choir. For the little ones, there is an opportunity every Sunday during Mass to explain the texts of the liturgy of the day in a children-friendly way. Also, for the children, catechesis sessions are organised every week. For the adults, opportunities to increase their faith (prayers of praise, Bible sessions, etc.) are organised from time to time. Little by little, the French-speaking community has almost created a mini-parish with about 50 people on average attending Sunday Masses.

I was sent to this "mini-parish" for my weekly apostolate where I teach catechism to the children. As there are many age-groups, the catechism groups are subdivided into four classes. I was assigned to the older ones, 10-12 years old, who are preparing for their profession of faith. As this is a year in which the aim is to teach them the Catholic faith by tracing the history of salvation, our sessions began with an emphasis on the Old Testament, especially the creation stories with Adam and Eve. The period when I was teaching them these creation stories coincided with the period when I was getting a theological grounding in the book of Genesis as a first year Theology student. For children, as for any adult new to the Catholic faith, the creation stories are usually learned without much thought behind them. But as an apprentice theologian, these stories take on a philosophico-mythological character which leads to another stage of reflection. At the beginning, the discovery of this theological character resounds like shockwaves compared to the naivety which one has accumulated since childhood. However, this naivety has all its legitimacy because it is what cradles the child's subconscious until he/she matures to adulthood in the faith.

The genius of the catechist is to know how to reconcile the theological character of the biblical stories and other ecclesiastical testimonies with the naivety that must not be lacking in the 10-year-old child. This is the age when the child begins to make his or her own mark in the Bible. In doing so, the child asks a lot of questions as do my children in catechism. For me, it is a real place of learning how to bring the theological truths of the Church down to a basic level, understandable even for children. This attempt is not always easy, but I appreciate the insights it opens up. In conversations about creation out of God's love, I had to find answers to questions about the place of animals in heaven. "Will my dog also be in heaven; he was created by God anyway." This child's questioning about his dog led me to take a fresh look at the many cats we "house" here in Hekima, especially one of them which recently gave birth to three beautiful kittens near the back door of Shahidi.



Christmas Story

- Dominic Mutunga, SJ

Biblically, the birth of Jesus Christ sets ablaze all kinds of activities and reactions – census forces his parents to move from Nazareth to Bethlehem during which "the time comes for her to have her child and she delivers a boy, her first born son..." (Lk 2:6-7). As it is in almost every society, the birth of a child opens wide the doors of joy, celebration, dancing, visitation, feasting sumptuously and many more activities. During her days of expectancy, the mother-to-be would have sewn several clothes in anticipation of the 'new arrival'. On the expected day of delivery, people would have gathered at the home – some cooking, midwives attending to the mother and elders chatting at the bonfire etc. This is the power of new life – it brings more life and joy. The case of Jesus is not so different: he is born in a 'boma' or call it a cowshed – arguably very poor conditions for a new-born baby. The shepherds, Magi and Angels all rejoice at the new life which will later bring life to all. However, some like Herod did not see life but saw a threat to his survival as king.

In the modern world, Christmas season is always loaded with myriad of activities until the incarnation narrative has now become just one of those rather than the pivot of Christmas celebrations (at least in some if not all cases). We may not deny the possibility that most of the Christmas activities are animated by that source of life which is at the centre of the incarnation narrative. At Hekima, for instance, this narrative reached its climax with the lively vigil mass, carols and socials afterwards. The Nativity Mass on December 25th was very lively and enriching. This was coupled with the celebration of birthdays on the same day as a way of drawing water from the fountain of life – by sharing life with Life Himself.

The incarnation narrative did not end at Hekima. It continued to other communities and families, depending on where collaborators and Jesuit companions spent their holidays. My story is that I travelled on December 26th and I must confess that, as expected, the first shocker was at the bus station: the large numbers of travellers and the double or triple bus fare was not "Good News" to my strictly budgeted *polanco*. All in all, east or west, home is best, and I had to go home. I reached home to meet the aftermath of a large family gathering which had taken place on the 25th – the day of the incarnation. All my nieces, nephews, siblings and some in-laws had attended this gathering. The agenda? To meet, to check on one another, to be with our parents, to share a meal and to catch up on all sorts of issues. The irony of Christmas is that although Jesus comes to bring life, goats, chickens, cows and fish must lose life so as to provide the sumptuous meals without which Christmas would not have taken place!

My dad being the generous family man that he is slaughtered two goats on the 25th and a third on the 28th. He always tells me that no one should ever go hungry as long as there is food to share. This for me is the attitude that the world needs and the new mind brought about by the incarnation – concern for the other wherein people experience the loving, peaceful, joyful and free way of relating. In this regard I must say that being at home in the company of my parents and everyone else, that nice feeling of being at home (not just the physical home but the relational family spirit), can never come from any other setting. I enjoyed moments of catching up with my peers, my primary school batch mates, and performing household chores which my mother does not think that a priest-to-be should do. My mum and I are always "fighting" because she likes it when I sit and eat rather than do lots of work. All in all, the Christmas family ambience is always one of joy and gratitude for all of us, especially for my parents. It is no doubt that children are the joy of parents and the 'Rose flowers' of the family. In my view, the story of Christmas is our story as individuals, communities and institutions not only to cherish and relish but also to tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere that the light of love, peace, joy and cordial relationships might shine to those in darkness.



Nurturing the Missionary Spirit in Our Lives and Missions.

- Pascal Bihorubusa, SJ

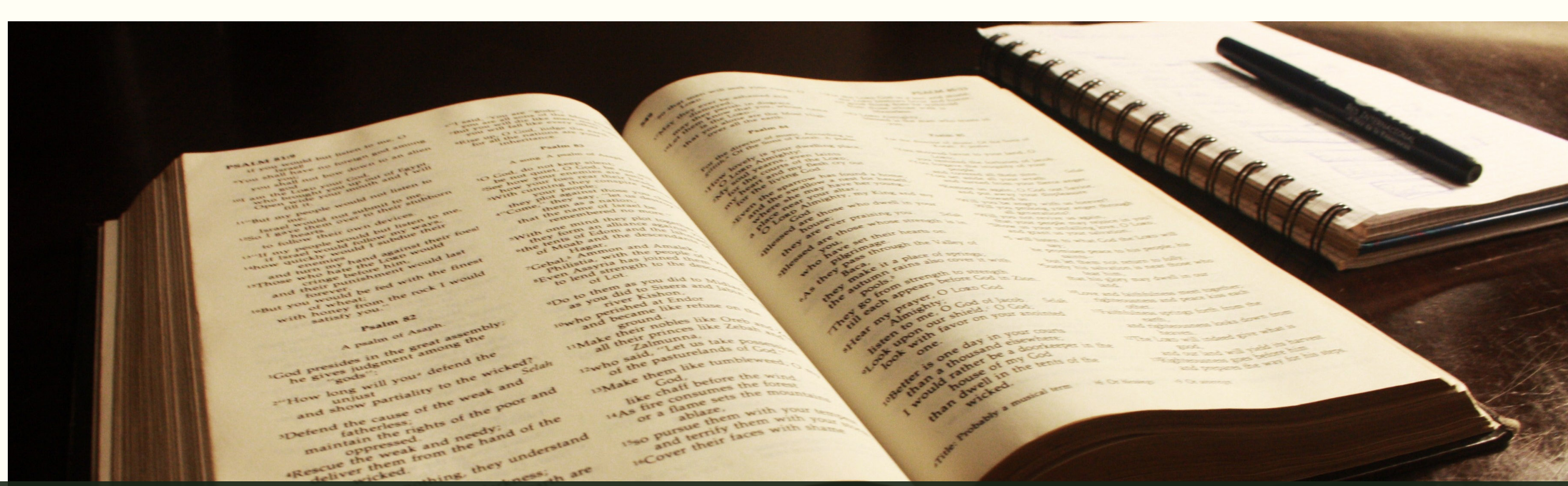
On Saturday, January 28, 2023, the Hekima Jesuit Community held a monthly recollection under the theme "My Spiritual Journey in Asia and Some Perspectives on Jesuit Mission". The facilitator, Fr. Barnabé Houguevou, SJ, currently doing his mission in Taiwan, shared his Jesuit experience, showing how God has been journeying and working with and through his life and mission in the Society of Jesus. His religious journey attests to God's presence and work in creation.

Fr. Barnabé's religious experience highlights how God's plans differ from ours. He wished to do his regency in Zambia but was missioned to China. After his regency, he was sent to the Philippines for theology studies. Prayer, reflection, and discernment overcame his fear and worry about learning a new language and a new culture. Through his religious adventure, he realized that God is always at work, sometimes working silently. His religious journey was inspired by Abraham's call, in Genesis 12, to leave his comfort zone to the unknown. This total availability requires freedom, readiness, and faith in the Lord. Fr. Barnabé's missionary spirit is also grounded in the missionary nature of the Society of Jesus, from its origins up to today. The first companions, St. Francis Xavier, and Matteo Ricci, among many others, had a missionary spirit characterized by boldness, determination, and passion to proclaim the Gospel with creativity.

As God's representatives, in our lives and missions, we are called to build bridges and to be agents of peace, dialogue, reconciliation and truth in our fragmented world. Our mission originates from God, the first missionary par excellence. The Church in her nature is also a missionary Church and all Christians are missionaries. Thus, we always have to discern God's presence in other cultures and traditions, in every human being and in areas that still need conversion. Being a missionary does not necessarily mean going far but blooming where we are and being witnesses wherever we find ourselves.

Our main mission today remains planting seeds of love and entrusting the rest to God who takes care of the growth, development, and fruits of the seeds (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). We should not be tempted to evaluate the success of our missions in terms of immediate fruits. We have to always pray for the gift of patient trust in God's silent work. In Oscar Romeo's words, our assurance is that "We plant seeds that one day will grow; we water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise." We should also be open to an encounter with others for it widens our perspectives and changes our perceptions.

Fr. Barnabé further noted that a mission is not only about giving but also about receiving. He went beyond the traditional conception of a mission to the gentiles to suggest a mutual, respectful, and fruitful encounter and dialogue with other people. This consists in finding a home among them. For him, a mission is *intra gentes*, meaning that gentiles are not only outsiders but also members of our community. This, therefore, calls for evangelization in our own places, to transform our communities into places of love, joy, and companionship; places where we feel Christ's presence. Finally, Fr. Barnabé said that a gentile is also me, my own self, and that part of me that needs conversion. The following day, Sunday, we had small community sharing followed by Mass at 12:10 pm.



The Beauty of Taking Bible Study as an Apostolate.

- Lucas Estevão, SJ

Bible study was not my preferred Apostolate option for various reasons. My pre-disposition was not a positive one. I imagined that in going for Bible studies in parishes, I would be meeting with people who would more likely have no time for such studies, because they have prioritized work and family life. This is the culture of any sensible capitalist society. Additionally, most of the time, committed members of Bible study groups are a minority. This can sometimes be discouraging for the one performing the apostolate.

I had suggested to work with people affected with HIV/AIDS and help raise awareness of this deadly disease affecting people of all ages, especially young Africans. I thought I would be doing some work with AJAN. My second suggestion was environmental care (restoring forests). I was not sure that this apostolate existed in Nairobi, but I suggested it anyway. In both cases, I mentioned to the director that if it was impossible to make arrangements for these apostolates, Bible studies could become a third option. This third option was assigned to me. Finding out the dos and don'ts of Bible study apostolate was easy because senior companions are in this apostolate.

It did not take long before I found out the beauty of this apostolate. One reads the Bible with different eyes. Those present in the group are people who live outside the confines of Hekima (non-religious). They experience life differently from a religious' perspective, so, every verse in the Bible has to have life-meaning. My reading of the Bible and my life itself changed. One learns to literally pray with life experiences and the idea of *finding God in everything* finds its deeper meaning in questions, opinions and stories that people share during our studies.

The members of the Bible study group also share a sense of family. They share the joys and pains of their daily lives. They encourage each other in moments of grief and console each other just as it was in the *first Christian communities*.

Being a student of theology and having Bible studies as an apostolate has made it easier for me to connect theory and practice. Bible studies makes one read the Bible itself with both academic and spiritual eyes. It helps one develop a certain sense of self-evaluation of one's personal views and beliefs on what is being read. It sustains one's prayer and spiritual life and, above all, discussing the Bible with others becomes vital in preparation for any potentially challenging questions which might arise from the member.

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