Rebirth

Caught in the whirlpool of death and birth
Whelmed in the vortex of abundance and dearth
We all fall victim to the eternal cyclone
Of regeneration and degeneration in our globe

For out of pitch darkness does emerge light
And the world of gloom it does render bright
Out of rotten seed does fresh shoot sprout
And lushness pervades the land held by drought

Life from death; renewal from collapse
The world is reborn after an era of relapse
Humanity was lost, thus came Messiah divine
And out of his suffering came Grace Sublime.

By Father George Okoro, MSP.
When I survey the Wondrous Cross

During the season of Lent, Christians are encouraged to journey with our Lord Jesus Christ for forty (40) days through the desert with acts of fasting, alms giving and prayer. It is a time of grace and repentance. It is also a time we focus on the magnanimity of God's love for humanity on the cross of Calvary. The image of the cross as shameful, disgrace, sacrifice and pain was transformed into a symbol of triumph, honor, love and salvation by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. To prove that He loves us, Christ sacrificed everything, emptied Himself of his glory, taking the form of a slave - human form. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:7-8).

Our lives as Christians entail a continuous sacrifice and letting go of our material attachments, habits, comfort and pleasures of life in order to embrace the virtues of poverty, simplicity, generosity and modesty. Like David exclaimed, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." (2 Sam 24:24). The act of sacrifice or letting go will always cause us pain. In this edition, Rev. Daniel Ihunnia, MSP in the article entitled, “Irish Footprints of Faith,” reflects on the remarkable sacrifices made by Irish missionaries to share the Word of God with Nigerians. More so, Fr Valentine Iheanacho, MSP expounds the heroic virtues of simplicity, poverty and sacrifice of the two saintly Popes John XXIII and John Paul II in commemoration of their Canonization on Divine Mercy Sunday 2014, as examples for all Christians to emulate.

The benevolence and sacrifice of Catholic missionaries has contributed to the growth of the Catholicism in Nigeria. Today, the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria is blessed with men and women committed to the gospel values. There is an inexplicable increase in the vocations to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministries. Above all, Africans are now missionaries to themselves and to the world. The Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria remains a significant testament to this reality, with missionaries working in Africa, Europe and America. On this note, Rev. David Okonkwo, MSP shares his missionary experience in the Gambia. There are many other inspiring and insightful reflections for your faith renewal.

Our dear esteemed reader, as we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, we remember that in every painful and sorrowful situation, all hope is not lost, for on the cross lies our salvation (In cruce salus). The one who died on the cross has risen from the dead for our salvation. May the risen and ascended Christ be our strength and our comfort!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editor’s Note</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I Survey the Wondrous Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Message from the Acting Superior</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You shall be my witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>News and Events</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Archbishop of Ibadan Installed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inauguration of AMSP in Yonkers, NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For the Record</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSP: Our Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Purpose is Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From the Missions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Experience in Gambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Fr David Okonkwo, MSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambassador People</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Irish Footprints of Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Daniel O Ihunnia, MSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Unpleasant Realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Fr. Anthony Iffen Umoren, MSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope Francis’ Innovative Simplicity and Leadership Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Fr. Francis Eyo, MSP Wal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death in the Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaze on, Elegance!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by George N. Okoro, MSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canonization of Two Popes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Saintly Fishermen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Rev. Valentine Iheanacho, MSP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book Review</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed of Glory: Journeying with the Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Acts 1:8 we have Jesus’ mandate to his disciples: Eritis mihi testes (you shall be my witnesses). These are the last words which Our Lord Jesus addressed to his disciples before he left the world. This is Jesus’ last will to us – that we should be his witnesses. As disciples of Christ, we are sent on mission and given the specific mandate of making Christ known to everyone and bearing witness to Christ. Thus every Christian is called to be a missionary. If the Church stops being missionary, she dies.

The early missionaries who came to us in Nigeria did exactly the same. These early missionaries left known lands for unknown lands; known people for a people yet unknown. They left familiar cultures for a culture they did not know. They did not mind mosquitoes, and other biting insects, scorpions, snakes, etc. They did not mind malaria and typhoid. We had no roads, no pipe-borne water, no telephones, not even means of transport. Nothing could deter them. I imagine what it was like for them. This mandate of Jesus is more urgent today than ever.

The work of proclamation, evangelization was initially left solely in the hands of missionaries. However, more than fifty years ago Pius XII in his Encyclical, Fidei Donum (the gift of faith) called on the diocesan priests to get more involved, to participate more actively in missionary work. Thank God the Nigerian Church has begun to respond to this call by sending diocesan priests to work in needy dioceses in Nigeria and in other countries. Along this line, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) led by Dominic Cardinal Ekandem established the Missionary Society of St Paul. Today Missionaries are working in many countries all over the world.

We live in a culture that often ridicules faith as being nothing more than credulity, bigotry and superstition. People want Christians to step forward and give a credible account of the things they believe. Some of these people are hostile; some are curious; some are amused; and others are sincerely searching for truth (cf. Scott Hahn, Reasons to Believe, {New York – London, Doubleday, 2007}11).

Consequently, in Europe and America, Christians are becoming fewer and vocations to the priesthood and religious life have been dwindling. Yet Europe was largely Catholic. Look at Ireland which used to be called the land of saints and scholars, today it is a different story. In Europe and America, the problem facing the Church has to do with empty pews whereas in Africa, the challenge has to do with filled-up pews. To explain it better: Europe received the word of God and this impacted very much on the people at the time but today they seem to be abandoning the word of God with its concomitant values. Africa received the word of God enthusiastically and this explains the churches that are full in many countries of Africa. However, crimes are on the increase everyday indicating that the Gospel may not have impacted enough on the lives of the people. Thus the importance of New Evangelization, renewal and deepening of faith cannot be overemphasized.

Given the above context Pope Benedict XVI declared the year of faith which ended on 24th November 2013 to provide an opportunity for renewed conversion and a rediscovery of faith all over the world. Along the same line, he established a New Pontifical Council for New Evangelization and called for a Synod on New Evangelization. These new initiatives, it is hoped, will enable the faithful to discover new and vigorous ways of living out their faith and new ways of handing on that faith in a world that is turning away from God and in an environment that is hostile to religion. Faith is a gift and the best way to keep it is to hand it on to others otherwise it dies. Through an authentic life of witness faith will continue to thrive and to spread no matter the forces against it, since truth endures forever. Our vocation as Christians is to love, to suffer and to save souls (LSS). May God grant us the grace to bear witness to him in season and out of season (2 Tim 4,2).
Joy springs forth again with the Diaconate Ordination

On December 14, 2013, eleven MSP seminarians were ordained as transitional deacons. This year’s diaconate ordination came as an answer to the prayer of the Psalmist “give us joy to balance our affliction for the days we knew misfortune” (Ps 90:15). Just few weeks after the painful and sad event of the funeral of Late Fr Joseph Braimoh, MSP who died five months after his priestly ordination due to severe injuries from a car accident on his way home from Mass. The ordination ceremony brought a great relieve and joy to the MSP family as the eleven young men proceeded to the National Missionary Seminary chapel, Gwagwalada, Abuja to make an irrevocable commitment to the service of God and humanity as deacons. Men who will fill in the gap and continue the work the Late Fr. Braimoh left behind.

The ordaining prelate Most Rev Dr Michael Elue, the Catholic bishop of Issele Uku diocese in his homily, advised the young men to imitate the first deacon, Stephen a man of good repute and profound wisdom (Acts 6:10) . Like St Paul, they must be faithful and committed to the great responsibility entrusted to them by the Church to be of service to God’s people in humility, generosity and simplicity of life as against the wrong mentality of service in the civil society.

The transitional diaconate to which the young men were ordained is the last step in their journey to the priesthood. Those ordained were, Franklin Achionye, Francis Agadaujah, Gabriel Ekpe, Christopher Ganga, Joseph Ibiwoye, Peter Okpetu, Isaac Shemang, Anthony Udoh, Modestus Ugwuschie and Cornelius Umoren. It was a beautiful occasion as MSP priests, priests and religious from different dioceses, families, relatives and friends of the newly ordained deacons danced during the liturgy in thanksgiving to God. To God be the glory!

NEW ARCHBISHOP OF IBADAN INSTALLED

The installation of Most Rev. Gabriel Ojeleke Abegunrin as the Archbishop of Ibadan took place on January 24, 2014 at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Ibadan. He succeeds the Most Rev Felix Alaba Adeosin Job as the 2nd Archbishop of Ibadan, Nigeria. The new Archbishop was born in 1949 in Iwere-Ile, Nigeria. After completing his studies at Saints Peter & Paul Major seminary in Ibadan he was ordained a priest for Oyo diocese in 1979. He was sent to study Canon Law at the Urbaniana Pontifical University in Rome from where he graduated in 1988. Returning to Nigeria he was appointed the parish priest of St Ferdinand's parish, Ogbomosho and then, in 1992, as Cathedral Administrator in Oshogbo.

In 1995 the diocese of Osogbo was carved out of Oyo diocese and Fr Gabriel Abegunrin was appointed as its first Bishop. He has led the fledgling diocese with great pastoral care until his translation to Ibadan by Pope Francis on 29 October 2013. As bishop he has served on several national Church groups, including Chairman of CAN and Chairman of the Lay Apostolate Organizations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. The Federal Government appointed Bishop Abegunrin as Chairman of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee on the Ife-Modakeke Crisis (2000).

The Archdiocese of Ibadan has 5 suffragan diocese namely: Oyo, Ilorin, Ondo, Ekiti and Osogbo. The Archdiocese has an area of 7,000 sq kms with a population of 5.4 million of which 443,000 are Catholic. They are served by 172 priests and 965 religious.

The Missionary of Society of St Paul extends her best wishes to the new Archbishop as he assumes a greater pastoral responsibility and leadership. We also extend our gratitude and best wishes to Archbishop Felix Alaba Job as he begins a well-earned retirement. May the Almighty God bless you.
Over a year ago in December 2012, Fr. Anthony Ita Bassey, MSP, the then pastor of St. Bartholomew, Yonkers in the Archdiocese of New York, invited Fr. Felix Ilesanmi Osasona, MSP (the director of MSP Mission Development) to explore the possibility of starting the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul (AMSP) in the parish. From Fr. Felix’s presentation, a group of interested parishioners came together to form the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul, a first of its kind in the Archdiocese of New York. On the 25th of January, 2014 being the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, Fr. Felix came to St. Bartholomew’s to solemnly admit 13 parishioners into the AMSP in the presence of the Pastor Rev, Fr. Raphael Ezeh MSP, his Vicar Fr. Daniel Oghenerukevwe MSP and many parishioners at the Saturday Vigil Mass.

After the inauguration ceremony, a dinner reception was held for the new AMSP members and parishioners in the church hall. The reception began with a skit of the life of St. Paul starring AMSP member Paul Capuano.

After dinner Fr. Felix gave a very informative presentation to all gathered on the needs of the missions, the growth of the Missionary Society of St. Paul and our lay collaborators, the Associate Missionaries of St. Paul. All present were very much moved by the presentation and encouraged by the work of this vibrant missionary group from Africa.

Fr. Daniel followed with a presentation on the many accomplishments of the AMSP of St. Bartholomew in the year preceding the solemn admission. Specifically:

a. The AMSP organized the Lenten mission almsgiving collection of the religious education children of the parish raising over $1200 to aid the MSP mission school project in Liberia Mission.

b. In collaboration with Fr. Daniel Oghenerukevwe msp, one of the AMSP member Ms. Vivian Cortes, donated an SUV Ford 2000 limited model to aid mission work in St. Joseph’s parish in the Catholic Vicariate of Bomadi in Nigeria.

c. In honor of the out-going pastor of St. Bartholomew, Fr. Anthony Ita Bassey msp, the AMSP donated $1950.00 for the sponsorship of a Seminarian.

The evening ended with Fr. Raphael Ezeh presenting a certificate and letter of appreciation to Ms. Vivian Cortes for the donation of her car to the Missions.

The AMSP of St. Bartholomew’s are presently planning for another Lenten almsgiving project with the hope to surpass last year’s collection.

MS. Vivian Cortes receiving her appreciation certificate
THE nature of our SOCIETY is missionary. Our name is missionary. Our identity is missionary. The reason for our existence is missionary. Whatever we do we do as missionaries. Our nature is also Pauline, meaning, tied to the nature of the mission of great Saint Paul the Apostle. How can we fulfil the nature of our missionary task today? Several themes can be considered but I shall state three briefly.

ENCOUNTER: That Paul was commissioned by the risen Lord was celebrated by many of the earliest Christian communities. To underscore the centrality of this event in the life of the church, Luke the Evangelist has given us not one, but three summaries of this experience in his chronicle of early church history (see Acts 9.1-19; 22.4-16; 26.9-18). Paul himself has left us a beautiful personal testimonial of his encounter in Galatians 1.11-24. Elsewhere he states that this encounter with the risen Jesus who had died and was buried previously (see 1 Cor 15.3-8) was the foundation of his apostolic preaching. Paul’s ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor 5.11-20; Rom 5.10; 6.4-11) from which each MSP is an: “...AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST” has its source in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is worth desiring an encounter with the risen Jesus—the same Lord who was crucified (see 1 Cor 1.23; Col 3.10) and who is power and wisdom for each of us Christians.

COMMUNION: Paul lived life to the full. He lived the best version of his life after his conversion. However, all his life was dependent on someone else: Jesus Christ. He tells us, “...I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me...” (Gal 2.19-20). Communion with and justification by faith in Christ introduced Paul to the favor or grace of the Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5.1-5). Living in Christ means breathing His Spirit of “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, modesty, continence, and chastity (see Gal 5.22-23 Vulg.; CCC 1832). Dependence on authority (power), money, fame, personal preferences, wealth, sexual vice, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, antagonism, rivalry, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, tribal factions and malice, drunkenness, and orgies (see Gal. 5.19-21) is ruled out in this basic Christian program. Even if we have an Ignatian spirituality it has to be in service of the basic missionary character of Paul the Apostle.

PROMOTION: We have Paul attached to each of our names. That means Paul is our Patron. We may love Our Lady or Saint Joseph her spouse, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Patrick, Saint Theresa of Avila, Saint Monica, Saint Bakhita, and so on. However, we are not Missionaries of Our Lady under any of her numerous titles, neither are we Josephite Missionaries nor Franciscans, Dominicans or Jesuits. As good and recommended as promoting devotion to Our Lady and other saints may be, we are bound by our Pauline nature and character to promote his name. Father Peter Hogan, S.S.J. was in NAMISEM, Gwagwalada- Abuja in 1985 to teach a course on African American Catholic history. To my recollection, there was no time he concelebrated Mass that he did not mention Saint Joseph after the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. With that inspiration behind and before me I pray to mention Saint Paul each time I concelebrate Mass. For an MSP not to mention Saint Paul when he is concelebrating Eucharist for me constitutes at least a semi-deliberate venial sin!

And what would I say about our purpose? Briefly, we exist to bring Christ to the nations that all may the saved. We make the words of the Bible our own that God “wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2.4) In other words, we exist to give the highest glory to God in Christ that all of humanity reconciled by His blood on the cross may come to know the Father and have access to salvation.

Let’s pray for one another to experience the risen Christ, to live in Him and for Him, and to promote His servant Paul by whom we are named that all nations may be with Jesus’ Father (see John 20.17) in paradise!
My Missionary Experience in Gambia

Fr David Okonkwo, MSP has been working in the Gambia since September 2010. He recounts his three years missionary and pastoral experiences in the rural areas of this West African country Gambia. He faces great challenges of spreading the gospel and providing the basic necessities of life in a place that is predominantly Muslims, and also ravaged by poverty and illiteracy.

My First Impression

When I arrived in the Gambia, Fr Ben Mbah, MSP was there to receive me from the airport. It was with enthusiasm and a sense of adventure that I crossed the sea to my parish the next day. It was quite adventurous because that was my very first time in a ferry. St Michael’s Njongon, the parish center is a rural place with only one Christian family, a place without electricity and market. The parish house was completely inhabitable and abandoned since 2004 when the last priest to live there left. The house was beautiful outside but filthy inside like the “white-washed sepulchre” in the scriptures. As such, the first challenge was to make the rectory habitable. My predecessor lived in Barra (an out-station of the parish). The people were quite accommodating, very happy and appreciative of the fact that I was to live among them since my predecessor did not. This made me feel welcome and accepted.

The Gambia is a multicultural society. In other words, it is a cultural melting pot for many cultures that have their origin from other neighbouring West African countries.

These various cultures that make up the Gambian communities inter-marry and live harmoniously among themselves, producing a rich blend of cultural diversity. This has made it possible for the people to speak different languages other than that of their peculiar tribe. It is not out of place to see a Gambian who is proficient in more than one language like Wholof, Mandinka, Manjago, Fula and etc.

This advantage, as impressive as it is, poses no small challenge to the missionary. To learn a language in a multi-linguistic society is not always easy. One struggles to learn something in Wholof language and goes out with enthusiasm to practice the new language with others, only to realize that those you meet may not even understand wholof.

A Growing Church

Though Christianity came into the Gambia a long time ago, the Church is still young and growing. The presence of European, African and Asian missionaries made the mission rich and dynamic in pastoral diversity. The efforts of the local clergy and religious have equally complemented the work of missionaries. The Gambian people as a whole have gained so much from the Church in the areas of education, health and human empowerment. There are about thirty priests working in the Gambia. Most of them are working in the urban area while five are working in the rural area.

Mass Centres As Basic Christian Communities

One thing that is peculiar to rural parishes is the existence of out-stations. In my first parish, I had eighteen Christian communities. In Soma, I had about ten Christian communities with three Mass centres. Four of these Christian communities
are in Senegal (a neighbouring country). It is usually the common practice to take the children and their parents from some of these Christian communities back to their homes after the Mass. This is one concrete way of encouraging them to remain in the faith. So it is always a thing of joy and excitement to see children waiting along the road for the priest on Mass days. Going to those rural places brings me a lot of pastoral fulfilment because the Christians in those Christian communities are more in number and equally very active.

One major difficulty here is having to travel long distances on bad roads to the Mass centres in order to celebrate the Mass. Besides the long distances, it is often disappointing and frustrating when the people do not show up for the liturgy. The reason for their absence could be that they went to the farm or to other neighbouring villages for marriage or child-naming ceremonies. At times, it is due to hang-over of an all-night festival celebration. Being a rural setting, no one considers it necessary to inform the priest not to come and maybe the non-availability of modern means of communication does not permit such simple information.

Sacramental Life of the People

Matrimony: From my experience, most of the married Christians are living without the sacrament of matrimony. The phobia for the Church’s sacramental marriage is mostly on Christian men. Some of them shun it on the grounds that it would hinder them from inheriting the wives of their late relatives since it is culturally permissive. Others stay away from Christian wedding because they feel their wives will become uncontrollable. Though there are few instances where the man is ready and open towards the sacrament but the woman may not consider it as important.

Holy Eucharist: The reception of first Holy Communion is well structured in the sense that it is included in the educational system such that a Catholic child receives the Holy Eucharist in the third grade of his/her elementary education as catechetical instruction is part of the school curriculum for third graders. Catechetical instructors are employed in schools to teach the children. Some poor parents discourage their children because they cannot afford the elaborate party that traditionally follows the reception of First Holy Communion. This was the case in my parish but after much catechesis and persuasion, some of the parents came to the realisation that the reception of the sacrament can take place without the party. In order to remedy the situation, about twelve catechumens who received the sacraments of baptism and Holy Eucharist had to organise only one reception party. This was done with their various families and the parish community.

Penance: If there is a sacrament that people do not frequent in the local church, it is penance. Pondering over it, one cannot pin-point the reason for the lack of appreciation for the sacrament. Personally I do not think that it has anything to do with proper and integral catechesis because I have spent two years trying to catechising my parishioners on the importance of frequent confession and yet not more than ten persons come for confession. Thinking initially that it might be a question of shyness, so I invited another priest from Farafenni so that our people might feel free to go for confession but it never worked. However, on big occasions like the annual Marian Pilgrimage to Kuntuja, one finds many people going for confession.

Catechesis: The Church is trying her best to improve in the area of catechesis. She trains catechist and catechetical instructors, sending them to parishes and schools to teach the people. Personally, I still feel that she needs to do more in this area by giving better remuneration and benefits to church workers. On the side of the people, their catechetical knowledge is still poor and needs improvements. For instance, I was accosted by one of my literate parishioner on the grounds that I claim not to take alcoholic drinks but...
take wine at Holy Mass. You could imagine my shock and disappointment. I took time to explain to him what happens at Holy Mass when the words of consecration are pronounced. Hence what we drink at Holy Mass is not wine but the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Education and Employment Opportunities
Most people in the rural areas are not literates because they did not have the opportunity to get a formal education. Even those with formal education, are sometimes not qualified to get white collar jobs. Most of the rural dwellers are farmers, some are fishermen and others are traders. However, presently, with the assistance of the government, the Church and NGOs, their children are receiving good formal education. Scholarships are given to their children and job opportunities are created for them upon the completion of their education. Many educated young men and women in the rural areas tend to migrate to the cities for better job opportunities. Some of the children move to the urban areas for their secondary education and never return to their villages. Consequently, these rural areas and parishes remain basically the same, year in and year out. It is not uncommon to see priests and religious doing all the readings at Holy Mass because those present at that Eucharistic celebration can neither read nor write.

Health Care
Due to the close proximity of the Gambia to the sea and river, the major cause of sickness in the Gambia is the mosquitoes that transmit malaria. In order to combat these unwanted little monsters, the government and the Church (through Catholic Development Office in conjunction with some NGOs) are providing free treated mosquito nets for the people especially those in the rural areas. Health care is readily available and affordable. The Gambians pay as little as $0.125 to receive treatment in government owned hospitals. Nevertheless, sometimes, one may need to buy some of the drugs prescribed by the doctor from the pharmacy store. Sad to admit but true, these privileges are not open to missionaries like us who are regarded as foreigners.

Relationship with Muslims
The Gambia is one of the most peaceful countries in Africa. Although it is a predominantly Muslim Country, Christians are not persecuted because of the freedom of worship enshrined in their constitution. The government has really done well in maintaining this peaceful atmosphere in the country. Major Muslim and Christian feasts are co-jointly celebrated by all. For instance, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not just a Church holiday but a national holiday in the Gambia. During these major feasts, the government gives out beef and turkey meats, rice or sugar for the people to celebrate. I had a good relationship with the people of the Islamic faith, especially the youths. Since I was equally teaching General Science, Biology and Mathematics, I was able to encounter them on one-to-one basis. The two parishes where I once served, are blessed with good soccer pitches and I never missed playing soccer with the youths. This cordial relationship promoted through sports, made it possible for me to interact and share ideas with them. Occasionally, I did visit some of them in their homes.

Conclusion
My three years of pastoral ministry in the Gambia has been an interesting, hard and enriching one. Honestly, it was not quite easy for me when I initially arrived in the Gambia, due to many factors like finance, language, the weather and lack of basic amenities. But I acclimatized within the first few months and started enjoying the place. I learnt a lot that will help me in my next apostolate. I give thanks to my superior for sending me to the Gambia and the Bishop of Banjul for accepting me to work in his diocese. I believe that I am leaving the Gambia a more mature and better person spiritually, mentally and psychologically. The harsh realities of the Gambian mission brought me closer to my God than ever before. It has taught me in no small measure that my God is always watching over me and that He is my true companion and co-missioner.
AMSP Jos Zone, Nigeria at the Open & Thanksgiving Day in Iperu-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

Bishop Emmanuel Badejo of Oyo diocese with priests and invited guests at the Open Day in Iperu-Remo, Nigeria

Cutting the Cake: Some MSP Priests and Friends during the St. Paul’s Feast in Cameroon

The MSP priests, religious and altar servers at the Feast of St. Paul in Cameroon

Singing and dancing during the Feast of St. Paul in Eden Park, South Africa
MSP Priests celebrating Mass at the Feast of St. Paul in South Africa

AMSP and Priests at the Feast of St. Paul celebrated at St. Philip Neri Church, Houston, Texas

MSP Priests at the Feast of St. Paul in Houston, Texas
BEGINNINGS
Growing up in the South East of Nigeria in the late 1970s could make a fascinating story. The Nigeria-Biafra civil war was just over. People were only beginning to find their feet once again. It was survival of the fittest. Many years before, colonial oppression was very strong ameliorated only by the presence of a few who proclaimed the love of Christ; the missionaries. These messengers of the gospel endured the loss of everything, family, friends and possessions to labor in Africa. In the end many of them did not return to their homelands. Their places of rest still lay here and there; traces of the blessed feet that trekked the rough pathways of Africa’s Christian destiny.

Nigeria cannot complete its history without reference to those fair skinned people (oyinbo) especially from Ireland. Sometimes I wonder what would have become of some native tribes without them, from Calabar to Kano, Lokoja to Lagos. At a time when harrowing illiteracy, hunger and disease assailed my ancestors, degraded under the heavy hands of colonialism and the Scramble for Africa, the Irish missionaries went against the currents offering hope.

ST. PATRICK, SHANAHAN AND NIGERIA
Between history and legends, there came a Patrick in Ireland. But also there came a Shanahan in Nigeria. The story goes that when Patrick arrived Ireland around 433 AD, strong currents swept his boat from the Irish Sea along the Stangford Lough unto the Slane waters near Downpatrick. Inside a little brick Church building in a place named Saul or Sabhall, said to be the first Church built by Patrick in 432 AD, I could not stop thinking about the spirit that inspired him. But I also thought of the County Tipperary born Joseph Shanahan who in 1902, aged 31 was sent on mission to Onitsha Nigeria, to my native Igbo land. He became the first Irish missionary to Nigeria. The urge to save the people much loved by God compelled him to never “neglect spending every atom of my energy, mental and physical” to establish the faith among the Igbo. Shanahan became Nigeria’s St Patrick. Indeed, Ireland itself had rough times, if one thinks of the sufferings at Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin for instance. But this never deterred mission. I think that there are moments in history when the hand of God solely guides a people led by inspired heroes. These were sacred moments and deserve to be remembered as such.

A SIMPLE QUESTION
But one question seemed to persist in my heart. Why do people so easily forget their histories and the sacrifices of their heroes past? Resentments over the church in Ireland especially by the mass media gave me a baffle. This could not be the church which my people in Nigeria beat their chests to remember with gratitude! I wondered if Strong Currents would ever be done with Patrick’s boat. The Church has been the bedrock of Irish life and culture in very many ways producing saints and scholars of global repute. It may be good to think about these things.

A RESPONSE
The Church in Ireland has crucial roles to play even as it faces hard times. Firstly, it needs to begin by helping people remember their roots. To accomplish this, it needs to open up possibilities of vocations and ministries from former mission lands. Such vocations are the fruit of the labours of the same Irish Church. Secondly, being on her knees should be her secret to discern what the Spirit says. Hence it needs to re-conceptualize its notion of universality in the Church. Inter-culturality has become a global force cushioning the discontent which trails the status-quo.

It might be time to welcome the reality of social evolutions especially now that vocations are slow. Naturally, people seek ways to justify their personal laxity in the universal call to holiness but they need to see the beauty in variety.

TRACING OUR ROOTS
I have felt so grateful to God visiting Ireland. It was an opportunity to say thank you. Tracing my personal vocation to the seed of faith planted by the Irish missionaries I see that humanity connects. Ireland has a very rich history ignorant of which, keeps one at a loss. And interestingly, the history of suffering under foreign oppressors struck a chord in my soul, a platform for a common story. It was easy to connect to the land which ab-initio nurtured my Christian destiny.

A legend says that before his death, an angel appeared to Patrick and said, return to the place from which you came. So he went back to Saul (where he began) and slept in peace on the 17th of March 461. The Irish church is not only about Ireland. It is also about the past, about the footprints in far places. May the Irish saints who trod the path of faith reveal the way of their footsteps and guide the pilgrims still on course.

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No human being is exempt from problems. Some problems are major while some are minor. Oftentimes it is the major problems that are noticeable and which weigh us down. The minor problems could be simply momentary ones which are quickly solved or are overtaken by events. There are people who say or think that others have no problems. Some people also say they have no problems in life. What they may mean is that they have material, human, spiritual and other resources which help them to solve or cope with their problems when such arise.

One of the fastest selling false religious ideologies in Nigeria today is that a true Christian cannot suffer or have problems. It is not a new ideology, since it has its origin in the Jewish understanding of retribution. For the Jews, it was unbelievable that the just person should suffer, or the evil person would enjoy in this life. Even some of the prophets could not understand the prosperity of the wicked and the misery of the just (cf. Jer 12:1-6; Qo 7:15; Hab 1:13; 3:14-18). And so the suffering of Job was regarded as senseless suffering; God should explain this, Job urged God (Job 13:22; 23:7). This largely Old Testament concept of suffering has become very popular today in Nigeria, especially in a context of massive and endless suffering by our people. People who believe strongly in God are daily asking God in their prayer why they have to suffer from illness, envy, discrimination, anxiety, pains, insecurity, financial difficulties, homelessness, boredom, lack of a life partner, marital problems, childlessness, rejection, calamities, loneliness, fear, cruelty, misunderstanding, poverty, anger, trials and temptations, sinful inclinations, and lack of love. People are asking God why should there be destructive earthquakes, tornadoes, suicide bomb blasts, wars, car accidents, plane crashes, and shipwrecks. They want to know why a building should collapse, someone should get drowned, another would lose a job and yet another would die young or die at this time. The list is endless. Many Christians are very confident that Christ took away all suffering by his death on the cross, and so we are free from suffering, pains and problems. Only go to Jesus, only accept him as your Lord, and it is all over, they believe. But the reality is definitely different.

There are so many unpleasant realities that we daily encounter, which test our faith in God. The worst that can happen to any person is to deny or ignore such realities, whatever they may be. If we choose to ignore a reality that we are faced with at any given time, the tendency is for us to miss the spiritual and temporal messages that are embedded in that reality. When we accept realities, especially unpleasant ones, we have attained a first step in resolving such realities, and seeing the hand of God at work in them. God is not only present with us when all things go well. Rather, God, I believe, is ever present with us especially in our difficulties and suffering in the power of his Spirit working through certain inspirations, ideas, people, materials, occasions and circumstances he sends our way. Indeed, it is in our suffering and pains that we become more alert to our nothingness before God, our need of God, and so feel God's help. It is a moment when we can experience and put into effect the unshakeable faith that moves mountains. Jesus identifies with all suffering people on earth, but does not promise that they will not suffer. His grace is sufficient for us, and nothing, no suffering can separate a true Christian from his love (Rom 8:35-39).

Our suffering can lead us to obtain many spiritual blessings such as endurance and hope (Rom 5:3-5; James 1:2-4. 12). Accepting unpleasant realities in our lives does not mean staying there and doing nothing. Rather, it is a necessary step to savoring God's abundant Graces which accompany us in our suffering. Only those with a deep faith in God's mysterious and abiding presence in suffering can have that experience, which will definitely lead to singing songs of thanksgiving to God later on.

Our suffering can lead us to obtain many spiritual blessings...
Innovative Simplicity & Leadership Model

Missionaries of St. Paul are familiar with the expression “Simplicity of Life,” because it is one of the core values of the Society that is boldly written in the Constitution (Art. 12) and in the oaths of temporary and permanent membership. Simplicity of life is a choice that comes from within but can be further strengthened by faith while relying on God. It goes beyond the rules and rituals of religious observance. It is highly innovative, a sign of maturity and freedom to live for justice and generosity as against power, affluence and domination.

The election of Pope Francis on 13th March 2013 and his innovative simplicity in leading the Church into an exciting period of fresh beginning have so far attracted positive press and media coverage all over the world. People from different parts of the world have shown great excitement and interest in this Pope and the core gospel values he holds. Being the first Pope from Latin America and the first of the name (Francis), his message of faith, simplicity, voluntary poverty and compassion has raised great hope.

**Simplicity and innovation**
The goal of innovation is positive change to make someone or something better. Many Scholars argue that innovation is change that create new dimension of performance. It is the idea of new solutions to unsolved problems. And some ideas are new simply because they have been ignored for far too long (Baeck, P. 2009, {online} http://www.wordprocess.com).

Innovative simplicity is the real way of being in the world that is becoming increasingly complex. There are people who think that because we live in a complex and rapidly changing world, we have to become sophisticated and constantly engage in complex activities in order to succeed. The effect of this kind of mind-set can be seen in the way we try to create complex systems in politics, economics, religion, etc. Yet, many experts argue that complexity inhibit innovation and create distance, while simplicity allows innovation and connection.

As we confront life in all its complexity, it is important to remember that human beings generally are driven by a simple hope day after day, for better life for themselves. Therefore, simple solutions to human needs and problems can be the most innovative. The fact that so many people all over the world are thrilled by Pope Francis’ innovative simplicity despite the sophistication and affluence of the postmodern world speaks for itself. Simplicity of life fosters humility, equality, solidarity, sharing, justice, mutual respect and makes our humanity attractive. The Pope’s simple but innovative style is an invitation to consider simplicity of life as the real solutions to many human problems that we face in political, economic, social and religious spheres of life.

The Church, in particular needs self-examination and evaluation of her commitment to the value of simplicity of life. Late Cardinal Martini’s comments are worth pondering: “the Church is tired in affluent Europe and in America. Our culture has grown old, our
Churches are big, our religious houses are empty, the bureaucracy of our Churches is growing out of proportion, our liturgies and our vestments are pompous … wealth is heavy burden to carry around. We are like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus called him to become his disciple,” (The Tablet, 8 September, 2012, pp. 8&9).

**Leadership and innovation**

Although it is difficult to find a single definition for leadership, there is agreement among Scholars that leadership: is dynamic and changes over time, reflects the context, in which it occurs, exists at many levels in society and requires a range of different skills and qualities depending on the context (Campbell, A. 2012, Leadership and Management Development, University of Birmingham). Innovative leadership is concerned with direction setting, with novelty, and is essentially linked to change, movement, ingenuity, negotiation, persuasion and drive for performance. It is the opposite of the conventional, bureaucratic, patriarchal, autocratic, fixed and predictable pattern of leadership that characterised the modern world of 19th and 20th centuries. Today, innovation in leadership springs surprises and allows for rapid and creative adjustment to new circumstances. This resonates with the Church’s call for new evangelization, particularly in countries where traditional Christian values are being challenged.

In this era pastoral leaders are to be innovative. To be an innovative leader, new skills and competencies are now necessary. Innovative leaders are most skilled at anticipating situations and deciding what to do; they have the ability to take decisions under time pressure and lead by example. They are open to change, to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Innovative leaders know and connect with their people, and identify with their struggles and anxieties, joys and hopes. They are quick to recognise that they cannot lead successfully unless their followers are willing to acknowledge their role, especially in those places where traditional values are being challenged by the wave of pluralism, where functions and characteristics required of them are undergoing change. Evidently, Pope Francis through his innovative and robust leadership approach has made a big impression on the world and this is widely acknowledged by believers and non-believers alike. He is generally being perceived as a man of faith, simplicity, vision and courage that connects with people at all levels. It is expected that we will cooperate and collaborate with the Pope during this interesting pontificate to promote the innovative leadership model now in display in the Universal Church.
I can still picture that day. It was a Monday evening, games day in the Seminary, and we were all rushing out with enthusiasm to the games arena. If Joseph Braimoh was enthusiastic he did not show it. Like everyone else he headed towards the sports arena, but he walked. Both hands were in the pockets of his blue short, his gait was calculated and confident, his shoulders - as always - were raised high. He was not in a hurry. His confidence was just too much for a Philosophy Two student.

I recall sometime in 2008 when some of us were selected to write and present a paper on behalf our Seminary in a symposium. I had the misfortune of writing that paper, but I avoided the second misfortune of having to 'spew' the content to the audience. So I chose Joseph Braimoh to do it. Of course he was jittery. He was in Philosophy Three and some bishops, rectors, and intellectuals were slated to grace the occasion. Then came the day of the symposium and Braimoh mounted the rostrum. A greenhorn in Philosophical studies but he did not look it. Instead I was the jittery one. But, when he began to present the paper, my fears flew out through the window. His eloquence, elegance and erudition made the Father General of Via Christi, Fr Angus Frasier, a white man to exclaim in Igbo language, “Chinekem eeee!” in admiration. Braimoh was that good. I guess that was when my soft spot for this young man caught on.

few days before my priestly ordination: he came to me and asked for my parting advice. I joking that if he needed advice from anybody it should not be me given that I was just struggling to survive the huddles of seminary training. But he insisted. He told me how he looked up to me as a model. Of course I was flustered; flattered too. I joked again that it seemed I was beginning to gain disciples and we both laughed on the joke. That was the last time I saw Joseph Braimoh, though it was not the last time I heard from him.

When I heard on Friday November 15, 2013 that he was involved in a car accident on his way from Mass and was in a critical condition, I said some prayers for him and moved on. It never crossed my mind that it was that serious. However,
when I asked and was told the following Sunday that he was still in a critical condition, I became alarmed. Many of us around – all priests and contemporaries – resorted to serious prayers. We really prayed; we never prayed nor prepared for the obvious. Our sole prayer was for Joseph to come back to us, but heaven had other plans. It was like being hit on the head with a hammer when I heard of his passage into glory. I went numb. All my encounters with that noble young man flashed across my mind.

“God, how could you let this happen?” I kept asking. Even though, I had no doubt in my mind that he was going straight to heaven (since he just finished celebrating the Holy Mass) I still needed a strong faith to accept God's will to take him at this time. I pitied his mother even though I never met her. How would she come to terms with the fact that the son because of whom she danced with glee barely five months ago (at his priestly ordination) had passed on? Myriads of thoughts and memories crossed my mind.

Although, I observed Joseph as having a tendency to be aloof sometimes, I realised that he was an all round good and honest person. I will not forget the first time I heard him take the Gospel Acclamation at Mass. He had a good voice, but he rendered the acclamation with over-polished phonetics which drew chuckles from the four corners of the chapel. That evening in the refectory the “rabble” among us surrounded Joseph at his table and mimicked him in a devastating way that would arouse the indignation of anybody. At first he smiled; then he laughed, later he joined us in the mimic. That was the mark of a solid man.

There were many events and situations to remember Fr. Joseph Braimoh by, but in all these one could glean the fact that he strived to be honest, noble, and just. He had weaknesses like everybody else, but he did not just accept them as weaknesses inherent in all humans. He worked on them.

That desire, that deep yearning for excellence drove his character and pervaded everything he did. This was made evident in his academic performance, his achievement in the basketball court, and his social life in general. Joseph was reluctant to join any organisation in the Seminary, both academic and spiritual. I was one of those who cajoled him to join one, but instead of joining the already existing ones, he founded (or rather resurrected) one – the Purgatorian Society. He was the president, secretary, and public relations officer of this organisation. In fact, he was the only member, and he was good at it. He never failed to pray for the souls in Purgatory both at Mass and in his private devotions.

We Christians profess the communion of the saints. Even though Joseph Braimoh is gone from our sight he has not gone from our fellowship. He is still an MSP even in death and like the knights of the legendary King Arthur's round table we could pledge with him: “brother to brother, friends in life and death.”

Elegance, I know you can hear me. Just the same way I used to yell at you in the court to jump and make a basket, I still yell: Rise into heaven with a blast and on your way set ablaze the firmaments like a gargantuan comet!
On June 21, 2013 Pope Francis in his address to members of the pontifical diplomatic service with a Latin dictum outlined three criteria to look for in their recommendation of any candidate for the episcopacy. That dictum inspired by the profound experience of the spiritual fathers, highlights holiness, intelligence and prudence. It is expressed thus: “if he is holy let him pray for us, if he is learned, let him teach us, if he is prudent, let him govern us.” Applying it to the selection of bishops, Pope Francis insisted that while a bishop is expected to be prudent, he must in the first place, be a pastor, close to the flock entrusted to him. He wants his brother bishops to “love poverty, interior poverty, as freedom for the Lord”, and “exterior poverty” as freedom from material attachment to be seen in their “simplicity and a modest lifestyle.” Those qualities were evidently visible in the lives of the two saintly popes: John XXIII and John Paul II.

Anyone who has read Journal of a Soul, a spiritual autobiography of Blessed John XXIII may come away with the impression that Pope Francis in the cited speech was presenting the poor man from Sotto il Monte as a model. Pope Francis sought to emphasis one fact that whatever office one may hold as a Christian, one should never forget the final goal which is the holiness of life anchored on Jesus, the True Vine. John XXIII, fondly remembered as “Papa buono” (the good pope) never lost the consciousness of being a Christian and a disciple of Jesus Christ as the highest of all vocations.

One of the testimonies from the life of John XXIII is that, a poor and humble background is not an obstacle to holiness and not even to personal
Canonization of Two Popes

achievements in terms of “human” aspirations. Here are the edifying words of Angelino (little Angel) as his family affectionately called him: “Born poor, but the son of honest and humble people, I am happy to die poor, after having distributed the little of which I was able to dispose during the years as a priest and as a bishop, to the poor, and to the Church which nourished me. I thank God for the grace of poverty which I praised in my youth: poverty of spirit as a priest of the Sacred Heart, and real poverty. It has given me the strength of begging nothing, neither money, nor privileged positions, nor favors neither for myself nor for my parents and friends.” The hallmarks of his saintly life were underpinned by the virtues of “absolute abandonment to God for the present, and perfect tranquility with regard to the future”.

It was not surprising that in his address for the opening of the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962, he asked the Church to use the medicine of mercy and compassion rather than condemnation in her dealings with the world. Two of the three main projects of the pontificate of John XXIII: an ecumenical council for the Church and the revision of the canon law were to see their implementations by another saintly pope, John Paul II. Like his predecessor, the Polish pope before his ascent to the chair of Peter was shaped by a wide experience of life. Although not originally born into poverty like John XXIII, he was deprived early in life of the maternal love of his mother, becoming orphaned in his youth after the death of his father. He also lost his elder and only brother. Life taught him many things especially in the context of that dreadful Second World War and the unleashing of atheistic Marxism known as communism which sharpened in him the abhorrence of totalitarianism of any sort. Those initial inhibitions did not hold him bondage as Karol Wojtyla was generally regarded as dynamic, vibrant and a deeply spiritual person. In one of his first homilies as pope, delivered on October 29, 1978, John Paul II told his audience that the “Church prays and wants to pray in order to answer to the deep needs of man, who sometimes is so limited by the contingency of everyday life, from his weakness, sin, depression and from a life that looks meaningless. Prayer gives meaning to life, in every moment, in every circumstance.”

One key word that best articulates the pontificate of John Paul II is human-centeredness. This much was discernible in his first encyclical Redemptor hominis (1979) in which he identified Christ as the “the unique Redeemer of man and of history.” According to experts like Avery Dulles and James Corkery, in view of his own personal faith, his life history and his personal inclination, the human person as redeemed by Christ, stands at the very center of the pontificate of John Paul II and his message to the world. His concerns for the human person were firmly anchored on Gaudium et Spes of Vatican II. Another aspect of his pontificate is the universal call to holiness which the council in Lumen Gentium described as the basic vocation of every Christian. John Paul II through the numerous beatifications and canonizations that he carried out, taught the whole Church, and to young people in particular, that holiness is possible and within the reach of every Christian in every place and in every age regardless of color, language and culture.

Like John XXIII, apart from his personal and spiritual jottings discovered after his death, Crossing the Threshold of Hope (1995) is John Paul II's testament of hope. The two saintly popes meet and complement each other on many fronts especially in their re-positioning of the Church to be an active protagonist for good in the remaking of today's world with all its developments and manifold contradictions.
MOTIVATION
What has come to assume the form of Seed of Glory is an extract from a personal journey and encounter with the Holy Spirit. This journey began as a search for meaning and fulfilment in life. It was born from a personal desire to know God through His Word. The actual writing is a mandate that I received to share what has been given to me with others who may be in such need.

METHOD
Our method is didactic. It takes a particular theme, articulates its theological sense, situating it within the frameworks of the Sacred Scriptures and relating it to our day-to-day living. After which I seek to conclude with my personal shared-experience on a particular theme.

SOURCES
The primary sources of this work are the Sacred Scriptures, the New Catechism of the Catholic Church and the New Dictionary of Theology.

SUMMARY
Seed of Glory is a spiritual project woven in twenty-two chapters. Its point of departure is the Word of God understood as “Rhema: The Power of the Spoken Word.” It moves into the specialty of the Holy Spirit, which is “anointing,” by means of which believers are empowered.

One concrete way of this empowerment is “teaching with Authority,” like the Master, Jesus. Such is evident the way the leaders are elected in the Body of Christ, the Church. One sure way of moving on in partnership with the Holy Spirit is being able to let go the past hold fast to what lies ahead. In our journey faith as Catholic, we have the Mother of God as ideal model worthy of emulations. She is the Mother of the Savior of the world, who had to endure bitter passion in order to enter in glory by means of the paschal mystery. Now exalted on high, He is adored and worship by all the living creatures.

The human creatures who worship him are always afflicted by inner contrary voices, through which emerge either blessings or curses. In order to withstand the challenges of life, we are encouraged to put on the whole armour of God and move along the track route of the Holy Spirit, for there is power in being spiritually connected with the Holy Spirit. This deep connectedness makes us become now born in Christ Jesus, through the experience of baptism of the Holy, by means of which we receive various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through these gifts of the Holy Spirit we are able to understand the deep things of God and are able to discover and relate personally to the spirit world, especially our guardian angels. We are also able to speak in tongues and interpret them, discovering the deceit of the devil designated with the number 666. With the insight and strength of the Holy Spirit we are able to know and courageous enough to expose the Jonah in the boat, i.e. the root cause of the problem, which sometimes comes through various temptations, until we are able to rediscover our exalted position in God, as God’s beloved children.
Daily Prayer for MSP

Heavenly Father, you created us and you care for us: We thank you for taking the Missionary Society of St. Paul into your care. We ask you to continue to watch over us. Fill us with your love, and help us to build a family where each member irrespective of tribe, feels at home with other members and is encouraged to give his best in the missionary work.

Lord Jesus, you died for us and you call us to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth; we thank you for enabling us to participate in this your saving work among people of every race. Fill us with zeal and a sense of commitment like St. Paul, to bear witness to your love and reconciliation. Help us with a lifestyle that will make us proclaim your Word with power and conviction. Send us your grace to make good whatever is lacking in us as individuals and as a Society.

O Holy Spirit, you enlightened the hearts of the apostles, we beseech you now to continue to enlighten us and consecrate us in the truth. May each of us realize how invaluable our contributions can be, and thus invest our energies towards the success of our missionary endeavours. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady Queen of Apostles, pray for us St. Paul our Patron, pray for us, May the souls of our departed MSP brothers, AMSP brothers and sisters, and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

(To be said daily by all MSP and AMSP)

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