

PARISH OF ST JOSEPH THE WORKER

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Dear

January is a rather bleak month in Scotland and, year after year, dour winter weather displaces all other topics of conversation. February is a kinder month, it is shorter and before we know it, the month has come to an end and we are on track for the joys and hopes that Spring promises.

In Ecuador, there is no spring, summer, autumn or winter as such. There is just the rainy season and the dry season. The division is not equal as we tend to have at least eight months when we don't see any rain at all. February tries to compensate for the shortness of the wet season. This year has been no exception: for a number of days one half of the country was totally isolated from the other because of land slides affecting the roads; sides of mountains having fallen into valleys; miles and miles of farm land being flooded and the livestock drowned. It is not a happy picture and people are bracing themselves against the losses and hardships they have suffered and will continue to suffer because the government is broke and where can help come from! I am glad that I have not been able to move much about the parish. General chaos pervades.

MY ILLNESS

Hope it will be a February and not a January topic! My operation was on the 17th of the month. They took out the old hip replacement and as happens here I had to go to a "shop" and buy a new one: two bits of steel, one like a nine inch bolt with a ball at one extremity and which is hammered down the femur, and the other is cup shaped and is placed in the spine. The ball end is forced into this cup and

connects the leg with the rest of the body and enables a person to walk. I think that the surgeon did a good job – time will tell. If he hasn't I don't know where that will leave me but it is better to be positive and optimistic. I was out of hospital in four days and am now in a clerical residence for a week or two. I have not to put any weight on then leg for a month. Pray that all goes well and by saying that I am not pulling your leg.



If the chair does not go fast enough I take off on my sticks!

A memorable 25th.

Burns was left in the shade!
Beside where I am staying there is a church shrine to the Divine Child. Every month on the 25th, thousands of pilgrims come to celebrate mass here and dedicate their families to the Divine Child. The 25th coincided with Ash Wednesday this year. We had seven masses and each one was packed out (1,500 and more). Twelve to fifteen people were giving out the ashes after each mass. I was in a wheel chair for four of the masses anointing foreheads with ashes till I was almost reduced to ash myself. It was an impressive testimony of faith. Hope this is followed by commitment! As Shakespeare said: "that's the rub" or was it something else he said?

Catechesis

In Ecuador state schools do not give religious education and so parishes have to organize their own system of catechesis. Adults are not great church goers and so getting the word round that the children inscribe for catechesis is also a huge undertaking. I would expect that by the end of March between 800 and a 1000 children and youths will have inscribed for the catechetical courses. This does not mean that all will appear when the courses begin at the beginning of April. At the same time between 600 and 800 are expected. The parish does not have a Catholic school and so I have to prepare more rooms for them. I had set up courses for catechesis in January and so that matter is attended to. I always admire the enthusiasm and generosity of the young in their efforts to educate the more younger children in the faith.



Most of my catechists are young university students or graduates. They have to accept a fairly rigid training period and for the first year they are “assistants” who accompany a more experienced catechist. One element that cannot be absent is the guitar. How I enjoyed the evening Mass in my old parish of San José Obrero, Quito. Young and enthusiastic singers would animate the Mass; the hymns or songs sung would be lively, modern, with a rousing beat and a social message denouncing injustice, violence or what not. After Mass we could spend an extended time on the balcony, making music, singing songs and simply expressing the “*joie de vivre*”. As the song says: “those were the days my friend, I thought they’d never ...

Solidarity with the McMillan Family

Every time I am in contact with Uist the recurring theme is Simon McMillan. Hope has dimmed but not died; people have even run out of questions as answers are not forthcoming; human resources are exhausted but let that not alarm us. We are a people of faith and a loving God holds the destiny of each one in his paternal hands. I pray and we pray that this conviction of faith lightens the burden for the family and gives them courage daily to face the future with optimism.

Latest Health Bulletin

I will soon be leaving this rest house for clergy. There were another five convalescing priests here with me and I must say that the two ladies who looked after the house could not be nicer. They were responsible for nursing, cooking, cleaning and you name it. The menu had its limitations. If it were chicken and rice at lunch time it would be rice and chicken for the evening meal. Chicken do not have a prolonged lifespan as chicken and rice is the staple diet for most (for the poor when they can afford to buy chicken!).

I was at the doctor today and had the stitches taken. It will not be till the 17th of March that he will give me a progress report. Meantime I do different exercises in order to activate the muscles and ligaments once again.

God’s blessing to you all and remember that spring is in the air.

Fr. Colin

