



MANDALAY NOTES



It is not the first time that Fr. Bernie was told not to take pictures. This was taken during the first day of demonstrations by the Buddhist Monks in Mandalay. He was on his way to see the Archbishop Paul Grawng to arrange for the ordination rites. He was in front of the internet café to check his email and find out who was coming for the 70th anniversary celebrations. As time was getting close to the celebrations final arrangements had to be made. He was going to the hotels, airline offices and other agents to make the final arrangements.

The first one to change plans was the Apostolic Delegate. The office called up the Catholic Bishops Conference of Myanmar. When Fr. Bernie made the return call to Bangkok, he was asked if he could excuse His Grace from coming. He would be coming again into the country after a few weeks again to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Major Seminary in Yangon and to ordain the new Auxiliary Bishop of Yangon. It was very difficult to force the Nuncio as he would have to leave Italy on the 7th of October and come to Yangon on the 8th and be in Mandalay on the 9th and leave right after the ordination ceremonies. That was one of the reasons why Fr. Bernie was in Mandalay, to get a bishop to ordain Rev. Thomas Htang Shan Mong, MS on the 9th of October.

The Archbishop was still in the Philippines and so Fr. Bernie had to go back down to Yangon and wait for him. While he was there he waited on his classmate, a fellow priest who had to be hospitalized. It was then that the Martial Law was declared and curfew was imposed on Yangon and Mandalay. Even though technically Chanthagone is not included in the Metro Mandalay area but it is only the way to the airport. So after consulting with his fellow La Salette and other priests, he decided to postpone the ordinations. Later that day all internet connections were severed and there were no more movies about what is happening. Fr. Joe Bachand, MS was gracious enough to respond right away and cancelled the trip. Many followed and so the ordination date was moved to October 26, 2007 to coincide with the feast of the Shrine: the full moon day of Thadingyut (end of the Buddhist Lent). We will put the pictures in the special issue of the Mandalay Notes later after the event.



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 70th Anniversary of the Arrival of La Salette Missionaries to Myanmar
 October 9, 2007

Thanks to Fr. Dominic U Thet Tin for vestments

With all these difficulties many Missionaries and some friends went through to obtain Myanmar visa to join in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the La Salette Missionaries on the 9th of October, 2007, the celebrations had to be cancelled. It must have been a let down for many of them coming from Rome, Grenoble, Vancouver, Honolulu, Boston, Manila, etc. When the government declared Martial Law and imposed curfew in Yangon and Mandalay, it would have been foolish to continue as planned. There is always another time!

The great objection of Rev. Thomas Htang Shan Mong, MS was that he had sent many invitations and even on the 26th of October, there can be no assurance that the ordinations are going to take place. He was told to wait for a few months. His classmates were ordained on June 14, 2007 in Si-lang. But God is good because there will be thousands attending his ordinations.

The annual feast of the Most Holy Rosary is now celebrated on the full moon of Thadingyut, the end of the Buddhist Lent. The students have classes even on Sundays during the Lent. But the full moon is celebrated all over the country. It is a great holiday and the feast is getting popular. It is expected that the pilgrims will number about three thousand in spite of all the difficulties of travelling and restrictions. So now there will be more expenses as there are no restaurants for the visitors in the area.

There will only be two big meals to be prepared. Many are expected to come earlier and leave late. Hopefully the weather will be as nice as it was on the 9th of October. They are preparing a couple of cows and pigs. But fish will have to be served for those who do not eat the red meat. Congratulations to Rev. Thomas Htang Shan Mong, MS.



Fr. Thomas



Rev. Fr. Thomas, that is what he will be called after his ordinations on the 26th of October 2007, is a very quiet person. His father is a Tiddim Chin teacher. He fell in love with one of his students and settled down in Paletwa area. Thomas joined St. Paul's Minor seminary in Pyay (Prome where the La Salette Missionaries worked). His high marks got him to the school of Economics. He was the last of the La Salette candidates to arrive in the Philippines.

After finishing his special year of Philosophy he joined the postulancy and novitiate program of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette. He took his first vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience according to the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette on the 1st of May 2002. While taking up his regular classes at San Carlos Major Seminary in Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines, he was able to complete his graduate program: MA in Business Management from the University of La Salette, Santiago City, Philippines.

After completing his theological studies he came back to Myanmar and joined the community in Chanthagone, Paleik, Mandalay. His first encounter was a mess of young people crowding the property during the whole Thingyan season (water festival in preparation for the New Year). He was able to find some peace and quiet after that invasion of some 700 young people. He helped out in the preaching and doing ministry with the other La Salettes. With thanksgiving to God and all the parents, relatives, benefactors and friends Thomas awaits his great day when he will be one of the consecrated of the Lord. Ad Multos Anos!

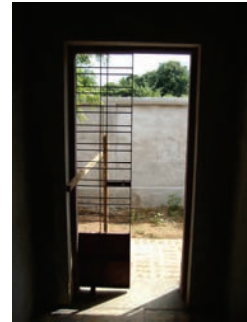
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There is still a lot of work to be done at the new retreat center that is coming up at the southernmost tip of the property. The government regulations in the country is so strict that even repairs for present buildings can be almost impossible. The original site of the retreat center was in Anisakhan, some forty miles up north east from the present location. But the government had confiscated the whole area and built an airstrip. There is of course no compensation for such cases.

The La Salette Missionaries lost four big schools in the sixties. It is only by the grace of God and the goodwill of some benefactors that we can have such a center in the center of the country. The Propaganda Fidei gave 15000 US\$. There is still a lot of things needed and eventually it will be a place of renewal and on-going formation. Thank you U Myint Wai for your kind help.



New Retreat Center

