

Tigoni letter April 2020

Dear Confreres, Friends and benefactors,

Many Greetings from our home here in Tigoni – Prince of Peace Monastery!

We are aware of the conditions in almost every part of the world now that has been affected by this scary and dangerous disease *coronavirus*. Again, we know that many people have died, others lying in hospitals as they are getting treatment, while the lucky ones have recovered. Our constant hope as we pray daily is that all may be comforted by the mercy, love and power of the Risen Christ.

It is in history that, “three influenza pandemics occurred at intervals of several decades during the 20th century, the most severe of which was the so-called "Spanish Flu" (caused by an A (H1N1) virus), estimated to have caused 20–50 million deaths in 1918–1919. Milder pandemics occurred subsequently in 1957–1958 (the "Asian Flu" caused by an A (H2N2) virus) and in 1968 (the "Hong Kong Flu" caused by an A (H3N2) virus), which were estimated to have caused 1–4 million deaths each.” (WHO Regional Office for Europe).

We are currently faced by the dreaded COVID – 19. On 31 December 2019, World Health Organization was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan City, China. A novel coronavirus was identified as the cause by Chinese authorities on 7 January 2020 and was temporarily named “2019-nCoV”.

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Some of the human activities are halted, and as other vital ones must continue there is need for extra care. This is because, as you know, the mode of transmission of the disease among us humans is obviously social contact.

Algeria was the first African nation to report her case on the 25<sup>th</sup>. February 2020. There was then a gradual increase of cases in various countries; and now it is not a matter of which country but rather increase in infections. We were somehow spared among the early cases but eventually the virus landed in Kenya.

As the community was celebrating the *New Year 2020*, there was an anticipation at any time while our novice brothers were on their spiritual time of retreat in preparation for their first vows. On the *3<sup>rd</sup>. of January* we joined our four junior brothers’ renewal of temporary vows.

On *4<sup>th</sup>. January* we celebrated together with our four brothers on their profession day of simple vows. They were presented by the Novice Master Fr. Anselm OSB, and pronounced their vows before Rev. Fr. Prior John Baptist OSB, the monks of Prince of Peace monastery, their parents

and invited Christians. Fr. Prior John Baptist reminded the young monks to integrate fully with and in the community never to wait for solemn profession.

This is normally a reminding call for the senior monks that it is not the time one has been in the community but the quality of life as a monk that matters. We witness Christ, especially through our vow of obedience, by learning to love and not seeking first to be loved. Furthermore, in our vow of Conversion of morals we constantly listen rather than being listened to, and in this way we give an open heart to God in our communal gathering round the holy table – altar – joining Christ in his redemptive mysteries of Passion, death and resurrection. This is the core and summit of a monastic life.



*Rev. Prior John the Baptist with the newly professed monks*

Bro Bernard is assigned to the prior's office as his assisting secretary. Bro Cyprian, a teacher by profession is teaching in St. Benedict Primary School Ruaraka, Bro Innocent prefers working in Illeret together with our Mzee Fr. Florian OSB and Fr. Benedict OSB and Bro Jerome OSB is glad to be in our Tigoni farm especially in the new poultry project.

The second year novices are already in the mission for their pastoral experience. Bro Cyril is in Nanyuki Community and enjoying his assignment in the farm. He has brought vigour in the community as a contor and order in the farm; seem the cows, rabbits and chicken are already familiar with his love for them. Bro Paul has joined the community in Illeret and being a mathematician he is expected to follow Florian keenly in his love for technical work and at the same time learn from Fr. Benedict some basic pastoral skills. Bro Martin is in Kapkemich parish with Fr. Thomas OSB. Father Thomas is known for his love for administrative work and the community is expecting Bro Martin to learn this together with pastoral work.

The senior members of the community had a seminar between 17<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> of March in preparation for the elevation and Abbatial election of our monastery. Fr. Joseph Oduor SJ guided us and did not hesitate to warn us not to look for an angel from among us as an Abbot. He will be just a monk, and our support will be paramount and above all love. True as it may sound that, “it is not easy to die even for a good man” but as monks we are taught to learn to love, first and foremost, those whom we consider un-lovable. This is only when we can be proud when talking about love to others.

Leaders come and go, but there is one thing we must be sure of, that the community is meant to exist as long as it is in the divine control of God. Our main focus is to love the community as we did when we joined on the first day. Community as of monks should not be an abstract idea since it is made of individuals like you and me. The more I feel part of its membership the more I should intend to love the other member, who is also a member, the way I love my own self. This love is expressed in the way I perceive the contributions of the rest of the members.

Fr. Joseph SJ, a teacher by profession, stressed the points by relying on the Rule of St. Benedict, both the Constitutions of the church and that of the congregation, and hinged on the Holy Scriptures to be the guiding principles as we walk the path of these events. He promised us his prayers and during his sacrifice of the holy altar of the Lord.

Fr. Prior John Baptist was not in attendance as he was on assignment delegated by the Abt. President to Christ the King monastery Tororo which was becoming a Conventual Priory.

Dear people of God we may be wrong and at the same time we do not want to exaggerate the life changing expectation that the Covid – 19 pandemic might bestow in our lives.

As social beings our close proximity with the other cannot be overemphasized. And this has become a major mode of transmission of the Covid – 19. It may not be a surprise to cease the practice of hand shaking and even kiss of peace. It may be a familiar exercise to wash or to sanitize our hands before we meet our porters at the gates of our monasteries. Our medical confreres may have to live in their secluded quarters, and keeping the necessary distance in our

community refectories may end up as a common setup. Will we be happy with sanitizing our hands before entering our churches and class rooms in schools, or even formulating a way of offering peace to each other during Mass?

There have been debates in theological colleges and among concerned Christians whether it is right to attend Mass online, What about receiving the sacrament of reconciliation over the phone? We should not be left behind in entering into such speculation for the good especially at this time when there changes are inevitable.

The Churches especially in Africa are now experiencing small population in attendance, which is already common in



places like Europe and America. We are invited to follow Eucharistic celebrations

*Easter Celebration in Tigoni Monastery*

online every Sundays. This we have experienced from during Easter celebration, although I didn't witness anything about the sacrament of reconciliation. Brothers and sisters we should not be left behind in debating these topics most especially with our pastors and theological experts.

The difficulties that the people of God have experienced during the pandemic is felt internationally. These has challenged the church both locally and universally to make a quick move in finding her position, as usual on how to help. In the archdiocese of Nyeri, where our monastery is the church has come up with a group of religious priests who are to journey with families in their social problems. This is in response to the threat posed by the rising cases of divorce among Christians. Fr. Joseph OSB was appointed in mid-April by the archbishop to be part of this team.



*Easter celebration in Nanyuki monastery*

I want to thank you all and wish you a very blessed Easter 2020!

Keep safe and healthy.

Bro Emmanuel osb.

*Tigoni Monastery.*