



All Around the World

By José R. Astúa | Photography by Lorelly Cochran

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. CCC # 27.

By virtue of baptism, which we have all received, we are called to evangelize. This means to bring the good news to every living being. This is a call given to us by Jesus himself while he was here on earth (Mk 16:15-16). However, there are different ways in which each of us can respond to this mandate of the

Gospel and from which we must choose one and fully embrace it. On the one hand, we can do it as lay people in the single life or in married life or on the other we can do it in a consecrated form in the priesthood or religious life.

On many occasions it is difficult to discern the way in which someone should respond to this call. On this particular occasion we will describe what priestly life offers to fulfill our vocation and more specifically we want to talk about the vocational call of Father Jhon Edison Mena. He is a diocesan priest working in partnership with the missionaries of Yarumal, who has collaborated with our diocese during the past migrant season serving in the area between the cities of Muskegon and Holland.

Good Influences

He tells us that his vocation came about thanks to his participation in the Eucharist in which he accompanied his grandmother. Although with great sincerity he mentions this: "...the mass bored me, I only liked the homily since it was the only thing different during the celebrations. Besides, I was already analyzing when I listened to the preaching of the priests and I would say to myself: I would have

said that in a different way". Another thing that contributed in the process of his approach to the church was that his father challenged him not only to be an observer at mass, but also to help the parish priest as an altar boy and in other duties in the parish. This collaboration led the priest to see in him the potential for study. Jhon tells us: "When my parish priest was transferred to a different city two hours away from my village, he invited me to go with him and while I worked for him in the church taking care of chickens and the chores in the rectory he would provide food, lodging and I could also go to a better school than the one I was attending at the time".

From this moment on and at the age of 14, a young Jhon left home and began a period of hard work in which he studied during the week. Also on weekends he would ride his bicycle for two hours to visit his family and on Saturdays he would work in open pit mining. On Sundays he would return to the village where he was studying and it was then that he would do his homework for school. Two years later the priest who had taken him to live in that town was transferred to another place so Jhon had to go live with an aunt and in order to support himself he would sell fruit and school supplies during recess and other free times.

Decision to Enter the Seminary

Fr. John tells us that, although the idea of studying to become a priest was interesting to him, the decision was not easy. For one, there was the stereotype in his culture that if a man does not marry and have children it is because he has homosexual inclinations and on the other hand, in those years the scandals of abuse of minors by priests had exploded in Colombia and in many other countries in Latin America. But this did not undermine his dedication to the church, he continued to collaborate in an even more committed way with his parish. By then, at the age of 17, the future Fr. John was coordinating two youth groups, one in the parish and the other in the school. It was for this reason that he was contacted by the vocation promoter of his diocese to help coordinate a vocation encounter, something he had never done before. This situation led to his first participation in a vocational encounter from which he came out very motivated. Father tells us that "after I went to the second vocational meeting at the age of 18, I decided to send a letter requesting admission to the seminary, which was accepted". Father tells us: "I promised God in my prayer: I do what I have to do and I will do my best to

fulfill my duty, if they send me away I will not come back". Life in the seminary had its ups and downs, but his fidelity to the promise he had made to God helped him to complete this process in a serene and successful way.

Serving Those Most in Need

It has been almost 4 years since Fr. Jhon was ordained and the bishop of his diocese assigned him to work in association with the missionaries of Yarumal, a congregation founded in Colombia in 1927 by Monsignor Miguel Angel Builes. Fr. Jhon is currently working in Kenya in what we call mission "ad gentes". In Africa he is serving a community in a village called Twm where there is a great shortage of water because it does not rain and there is a lack of vegetation. There is no drinking water, no basic sanitation, no sewage, no paved roads and the people are very poor. In addition to this poverty, there is an environment of tribal wars where the Turkana and Samburu tribes kill each other because of historical grudges that are renewed every time they confront each other and recreate this circle of hatred. Father has been in these lands for 2 years and in order to do his pastoral work he has had to learn two native languages, Swahili and Samburu, in addition to English. In this way he is able to carry out his ministry by celebrating the Holy Eucharist, organizing workshops, retreats and meetings for his parishioners. Fr. Jhon still has 4 more years of service in the mission after which he will return to his homeland, Colombia, to continue his priestly life in the midst of the people where he was born.

Let us keep Fr. Jhon in our prayers so that his work may bear many fruits of life in the troubled place where he is offering his ministries. Let us pray that God will give him the strength to remain faithful to his vocation and let us ask the Lord to raise up among us many vocations to the priesthood, diocesan, missionary and religious life.

Click [here](#) to view additional photos.