

day, to extract two or three golden nuggets. Let us march forward, then, along the path to which God without any merit on our part has deigned to call us" (ibid. pp.29-30).

When Fr. Joseph gave this conference, "he had already heard the Lord's new call to himself – to leave father and mother, brothers and sisters and whatever else was dear to him in Abtei, Brixen and St. Martin's. It was the will of the Lord to send him as an apostle to China" (ibid., p. 30).

### News from Steyl

In the "Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote" (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart) of February 1878 we read two interesting news items:

#### Acceptance of students

"First the notification that we intend, in the course of the month of March, to begin in our house a new course from the lowest class on. Those who wish to be accepted as mission students in our mission house may, therefore, apply for that purpose." Then the documents are mentioned which have to be sent together with the application, for instance, "a definite declaration that the applicant intends to dedicate himself to the work of the propagation of faith as a missionary to the pagans once he has completed his studies. ... A binding promise is not yet demanded; but the applicant must have an honest resolve to become a missionary to the pagans and he will have to renew it in writing on different occasions later on." Then a detailed curriculum vitae is required; furthermore the applicant has to declare how much of the school fees of 500 Mark the candidate, his parents or benefactors can pay. Even those candidates may be accepted who can pay hardly anything or nothing at all. "The students who are to be accepted will receive from the institution instructions, education, board and lodging, furthermore, as far as possible, they will be given some general laundry. Everything else, however, in particular clothing and books, they have to take care of themselves. Only when their training nears its end and they have bound themselves in some way to the house, will it take care of their needs."

#### The next new building

"We have hardly moved into the new not insignificant building which was completed with great effort, and we are already speaking about another new building. ... We have already gotten some quick lime and we have let people bring us a number of bricks so that we can begin at the beginning of March. ... We begin this building in a similar way to the earlier one: recognizing the need and for the rest trusting in God's help through the mediation of our generous readers."



## The Arnoldus Family Story

### Fr. Joseph Freinademetz applies for admission to St. Michael's Mission House in Steyl

In January 1878 Fr. Joseph Freinademetz, then assistant parish priest in St. Martin Thurn, diocese of Brixen (South Tyrol), read an article in the diocesan newspaper about the mission house in Steyl. Its content seems to have touched him very much (see: 'The Arnoldus Family Story', no. 8, August 2014). He prayed more than ever and it was precisely during prayer that he heard God's call to become a missionary. After his bishop, Prince Bishop Vincent Gasser, had promised to release him from the diocese in case he received admission to a mission seminary, he wrote on February 28, 1878 to Fr. Arnold Janssen in Steyl:

"Very Reverend Father! The fame of the missionary institute Your Reverence has called into being and on which the blessing of God so obviously rests has penetrated even to the remotest valley of Tyrol. Since the thought of dedicating myself to the cause of the missions has pre-occupied my mind for some years, I presume, with the utmost respect, to knock at the door of your house and beg for admission. I am now 25 years old. I began and completed my secondary and theological studies at Brixen where I was ordained priest on 25 July 1875; since 1876 I have been actively engaged in pastoral work at St. Martin's in Enneberg in the Brixen diocese. In addition to German I also speak Italian, of which my mother tongue... is a debased dialect; French I am able to read a little. I have discussed my intention with the Most Reverend Bishop of Brixen who assures me that, in the event of my being accepted, he will issue the necessary dimissorial papers [release from the diocese]. Some difficulty may arise from the fact that I am a chaplain in the Royal and Imperial Home Guard, but for this problem a solution should be possible. I have often sought counsel in prayer to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and since this desire becomes especially strong during such moments, I take this to be a sign that our Lord in his infinite mercy has deigned to choose me for this lofty vocation.



*I beg Your Reverence to grant my request. Should you be able to do so, then be kind enough also to furnish me with the following information. When I leave here what should I take with me in the line of books, clothing, etc., how long my stay in Steyl will last, and whatever else Your Reverence may think necessary. As I await with confidence and joyful expectation the granting of my request, which I presume to reiterate, I remain, with esteem and respect, Your Reverence's in Sanctissimo Corde servus [servant in the Most Sacred Heart], Joseph Freinademetz (Fritz Bornemann, As Wine poured out, Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD, Missionary in China 1879-1908, Divine Word Missionaries Rome, 1984, pp. 30-31).*

Two weeks later Fr. Joseph had received Fr. Arnold's positive reply. Full of joy he answered on March 14, 1878:

*"My heart overflowed with joy when I read in Your Reverence's letter that no obstacle stands in the way of my admission to the mission seminary, that it may, in fact, take place in the immediate future. In a very short time, then, my heart's great desire will be realized. Accept, Reverend Father, my most heartfelt thanks for your willingness to admit me. ... In any case, it is impossible for me to leave before Easter. The winter school lasts that long and I am the head teacher." It was possible that he would only be able to come to Steyl at the end of July, because by then the bishop could appoint a successor from among the newly ordained priests. "Until then I beg Your Reverence to remember me in your prayers to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus that he may bring to completion the work he has so mercifully begun in me" (ibid., p. 31).*

### **Fr. Freinademetz's work in St. Martin's**

Fr. Freinademetz had been ordained on July 25, 1875 – a year before he completed his studies. After his first holy Mass in his home parish church of St. Leonard in Abtei he had to return to the seminary in Brixen for his final year of studies. On October 4, 1876 his bishop sent him to St. Martin in Thurn. There he was assistant priest. St. Martin parish church was only 12 km from his home parish church St. Leonard. *"Church, school and priests' residence... together with a cluster of residential houses form the center of the village which is situated on the western side of the Gader Valley Road, 1,130m above sea level. The ancient castle of Thurn lords it over the village" (ibid., p. 24).* The people spoke the Ladin language which was also Fr. Joseph's mother tongue.

As one of his pastoral tasks he had to give a Sunday sermon, on average every 14 days. He had to preach in Italian. Italians would have picked up immediately that Italian was not his mother tongue. But then, his listeners in church were not Italians and not used to high Italian style. However, what "their assistant [priest] wanted to tell them they understood well enough; besides, they sensed the urgency, the vividness, the warmth with which he proclaimed the word of God even though his ideas were clothed in a somewhat imperfect literary garb" (ibid., p. 28). His sermons were not short, they lasted 30 minutes and sometimes even longer.

His parish priest liked to send him to "visit the sick in the outlying mountain farms. The trails were in dreadful condition, twisting up and down. The farms might

be 400 to 500 meters higher up the mountain than the church" (ibid., p.24f). Week after Week or whenever anyone wished, he heard confessions. The faithful liked to go to him for confession. *"To go to Fr. Freinademetz is like going to Jesus himself. He knows how to console and he keeps for himself what I tell him. He is silent as the grave",* a parishioner said.

For half of the year Fr. Joseph's main work was to be teacher for the four upper classes in the village school. The language "of instruction was Ladin; the subjects included reading, writing, arithmetic and two foreign languages: Italian and German" (ibid., p. 26). "The school year lasted only five months; the rest of the time the children had to help with the farm work. During the two years Freinademetz taught at St. Martin's, the school year began on 11 November and ended on 24 April" (ibid., p. 27). For those who had already left school, Fr. Joseph conducted a course in continuing education, especially in business accounting, and he did so on Sundays after the main Mass.

While studying in Brixen Fr. Joseph got to know the Capuchins who had and still have a monastery there. During the last days in the seminary he joined the Third Order of St. Francis as a novice. On August 1, 1877 he made his profession. In St. Martin he tried his best to win members for the Third Order and by the beginning of 1878 he had won four men and women. They gathered as a group for the first time in the parish church on February 2, 1878. Fr. Joseph gave them a conference which gives us a good insight into his own spiritual life. He said amongst other things:

*The Third Order "is the narrow gate, the straight path that leads to heaven. Therefore we have chosen the better part. For all eternity we will thank God that we were allowed to choose and to wear the scapular of the Third Order. We are not merely one of many fraternities. We are a real Order. An Order, a monastery in the midst of the world where we spend ourselves and work for this world like everyone else. True, we do not live behind monastery walls, we do not observe cloister, we do not rise at midnight to chant the divine office. Nevertheless we are true religious and hope that at the final judgment the Lord will call us, together with all the other sainted men and women religious, to eternal happiness. ...*

*"The Lord is our portion. He is our world. Him in the first place we want to serve and only in the second place the world. We want to be concerned first about our souls and only secondly about our bodies; first about eternity and then about life in the world. That is what it means to be a religious. It is, therefore, both our desire and our duty to be generous towards God, considerate towards our neighbour, strict towards ourselves." He went on to speak about*

*"serving one's neighbour, to be models for the entire village, everywhere to be harbingers of peace. And strict with ourselves. The scapular reminds us that we are penitents and must live poor. This involves nothing out of the ordinary but only that we separate ourselves from the world and its values. ..."*

Finally he referred briefly to the Rules of the Third Order. *"He recommends mental prayer in particular and the reading of the 'Following of Christ' [of Thomas à Kempis] as an aid to mental prayer. It suffices to read two or three lines every*