

that is one day to have a good death. –Oh, how important the holy exercises are where quite a few people again found their peace and where others were reborn spiritually. Everyone of them will keep the memory of these days for the rest of their lives; the places and persons are indelibly imprinted on their memory and quite a few even in their latter years bless the reason which made them participate in the joy of the holy exercises.”

Amongst the men were teachers, artisans, businessmen, farmers, students, labourers, one sacristan and pensioners.

Fr. Arnold mentions furthermore that almost at the same time as the men’s retreats there were also retreats for women in the convents of the Sisters of Notre Dame (from Essen/Germany) and of the Divine Providence Sisters (from Muenster/Germany). Both convents were near the mission house. Because of the cultural war in Germany these sisters had sought and found refuge in the village of Steyl.

JOSEPH FREINADEMETZ: FIRST IMPRESSION OF STEYL

On September 28, 1878, Fr. Joseph wrote to his parents and sisters and brothers:

The mission house “is truly a house of God. Here the spirit of piety and fear of God reigns.... I have never seen anything like it, neither at the Cassianeum [minor seminary in Brixen] nor at the Brixen [major] seminary. The zeal, the diligence, the simplicity of the students is something quite new to me. In spite of their youth they realize that life in this world must be taken seriously. This must be because all want to be missionaries. So I am most happy to be here and thank the Lord for allowing me to come to this place where I can learn many things, above all how to live as a Christian should. I have also begun the study of Chinese” (Bornemann, *As Wine Poured Out*, p. 37).

To a friend in Brixen he wrote about the students in Steyl: “For me it is a new spectacle to see how these young men, I would like to say, have completely understood the meaning of life. The love, the peace, the contentment which radiate from the faces of them all, and that in spite of the strict, and I can say, mortified way of life which they have to lead – is for me the clearest proof of the spirit that is within them.” (from Bornemann, *Der selige P. J. Freinademetz*, Freinademetz-Haus Bozen, 1977, p. 543 [This text is not to be found in the English biography of Freinademetz]).

In particular he points out the obedience of the students which does not make it difficult to keep discipline in the school. His overall impression of the mission house is summed up with the words:

The Steyl Mission House has a beautiful future ahead of it, if only it is concerned to keep the good spirit which is here now (ibid.).



The Arnoldus Family Story

JOSEPH FREINADEMETZ LEAVES HOME AND TRAVELS TO STEYL

Having met Fr. Arnold Janssen in Brixen, Fr. Joseph Freinademetz went back to his parish St. Martin in Thurn. On Sunday, August 11, 1878, he bade farewell to his parishioners. He ended his sermon with the words:

I come to my conclusion. For almost two years now I have tried to set before you from this pulpit the teachings of our Holy Faith, to show you the way to heaven. In all sincerity I can say that I have never intentionally offended anyone; whatever I said, was said from the purest of motives. If some good has been done through my words, the credit belongs to the Heart of Jesus. But if I have been the obstacle to much good because of my sins, I beg your pardon. I thank each of you for the love you have shown me” (Fritz Bornemann, *As Wine Poured Out*, Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD, Divine Word Missionaries, Rome 1984, p. 34).

On Sunday, August 18, 1878, Fr. Joseph said goodbye in his home parish church St. Leonard in Abtei. “His father, mother, brothers and sisters occupied pews well up front” (ibid.). In his sermon he told his people that he felt called to missionary service by the “merciful God, whose goodness knows no bounds, who chooses the small, the weak and not infrequently even great sinners to be his servants, his instruments.” He concluded by saying:

“Soon I shall depart from your midst. God knows, perhaps we shall not see one another again until judgment day. I cannot deny that it is difficult for me to leave my dear parents and so many friends and benefactors. In the last analysis, however, man was not created for this world but for something greater; not to enjoy this life but to work in the place to which the Lord calls him. For this reason I go, confidently and tranquilly, to the place to which the Lord beckons me. In the words of the prophet Simeon I say: ‘Nunc dimittis, now let me depart’” (ibid., p. 35).

After a tearful farewell to his parents and sisters and brothers he began the first long journey of his life in Bruneck: By train he went from Bruneck via the Brenner to Innsbruck [Austria] and from there to Munich [Germany] and then on to Steyl. About his journey he wrote to his parents: “No sooner was I alone and, like an orphan, abandoned by all the world than I experienced the truth of what a friend once told me: the farther we are from men and the more we are alone, the nearer we are to God. A feeling of confident joy came over me and I said to myself: you have left everything

for the sake of God; therefore God will never forsake you. Next I picked up the little book of Thomas a Kempis – the only companion I had chosen for my journey – and the first lines my eyes lighted on were the consoling words of Christ: ‘Come to me all you that are weary and heavily laden and I will console you’” (*ibid.*, p. 35).

Fr. Joseph interrupted his journey to Steyl with a few stops and visited churches, “especially those that are more beautiful than ours in Abtei. For a good stretch, some 18 hours, as I have already informed you, I traveled on the river.” Finally, in the evening of Tuesday, August 27, he arrived at his destination. About the last stage from Cologne to Steyl he wrote: “Meanwhile I had seen enough of Cologne; my heart is restless until it rests in those holy places which it set out to find. Therefore, forward! Kaldenkirchen, the last Prussian station, is already past; I have reached Venlo, the first Dutch station. Another hour and I reach the mission seminary. I approach it praying the Te Deum. Holy joy floods my heart, mixed, however, with a kind of anxiety. When shall I leave this house again? Wither shall my path lead? Qui dedit velle, dabit et perficere, he who inspired the desire will also grant its fulfillment” (*ibid.*, pp. 35-36).

Shortly after his arrival Fr. Joseph bound himself for one year by the vow of obedience to the mission house. Then “began the novitiate in preparation for taking the vow for three years” (*ibid.*, p. 38). In those days the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience had not yet been introduced in the mission house. Fr. Arnold gave him the task of teaching a few classes of Greek and occasionally he also conducted the small choir (*ibid.*).

A NEW IMPORTANT FRIEND: FR. FERDINAND MEDITS CM

In 1878 the Vincentian priest Fr. Ferdinand Medits heard of the new mission house in Steyl. He was born in 1841 in Hungary and in 1878 he worked in Vienna (Austria). He was enthusiastic about the mission house and, as was his way, he acted quickly: in the same year he asked Fr. Arnold to accept a young man as a student in Steyl (Fritz Bornemann, *Ferdinand Medits und Magdalena Leitner in der Geschichte des Steyler Missionswerkes* [Ferdinand Medits and Magdalena Leitner in the history of the Steyl mission organization], *Verbum Supplementum* 4, Rome 1968, p. 16). This was the first contact between Fr. Arnold and Fr. Medits and over the years it developed into a friendship; on the occasion of Fr. Arnold’s death Fr. Medits wrote: “Only a few knew Fr. Superior General of blessed memory as well as I did; we were like brothers to one another”(in *Nuntius SVD*, No. 12, February 1909, p. 55). In the course of time Fr. Medits would have, as we will see later, a great influence on the spirituality of the young mission society and the whole Steyl mission organization of which the veneration of the Holy Spirit is only one example.

FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL IN ST. MICHAEL’S MISSION HOUSE

August 29, 1878 was a true feast day in the life of the high school in St. Michael’s mission house; for the four students of the top class were to take their final exam.

“The rector [Arnold Janssen] presided over the examinations.” He himself also took the minutes for the first four subjects. “Tests were held in religion, bible history, and Latin (which included translation from German to Latin of Tacitus and Horace), Greek (Xenophon and Homer’s Odyssey, but no translation from German to

Greek), German Grammar and Literature, French (with translation both to and from German), mathematics, natural science, physics, chemistry, world history and geography. All four passed” (see Fritz Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen, Founder of Three Missionary Congregations*, transl. John Vogelgesang, Arnoldus Press Manila, 1975, p. 105).

RETREAT IN STEYL

In 1877 when the first new building in Steyl had been completed, it was first used for a retreat for priests and laymen. From then on retreats were an important apostolate of the mission house. In September and in the first part of October 1878 four retreat courses were preached for priests with a total of 210 participants and two retreat courses for laymen with a total of 90 men attending. The retreats for the priests were preached by Franciscans and Redemptorists whereas the retreat master for the retreats for the laymen was Fr. Arnold Janssen. For the men’s retreat from September 14-18 Fr. Arnold made this daily order for weekdays:

5.15	Rising	13.30	Spiritual Reading and free time
5.45	Morning Prayer	14.45	Conference and free time
6.00	Meditation	15.30	Afternoon coffee
7.00	Holy Mass	16.15	Meditation
7.30	Breakfast and free time	17.15	Free time
8.30	Spiritual Reading and free time	18.00	Stations of the Cross
9.45	Meditation	18.30	Evening Meal
11.00	Free time	19.30	Evening Prayer
11.15	Rosary and Adoration	20.15	Points
11.45	Lunch	21.00	Bedtime

On Sunday rising was at 5.30 am and the morning prayer at 6.00 am. At 7.00 and 9.00 am the retreatants participated in the first Holy Mass and the High Mass (Albert Rohner, *Die Vortragstätigkeit P. Arnold Janssens, Erster Teil. Exerzitien* [Fr. Arnold’s talks. Part One: Retreat], *Analecta SVD* – 30, Rome 1974, pp. 31-32).

In November 1878 Fr. Arnold wrote about these 6 retreats in his mission magazine “Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote” [Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart]:

What a great divine blessing that was once again! From September 2 – October 9 altogether six times spiritual exercises took place in the German mission house, four times for priests and twice for lay people. In September and in the first part of October Steyl had almost become a pilgrimage place, to which crowds of people coming from all sides made their pilgrimage, in order to dedicate themselves for almost four days to prayer, examination of conscience and meditation on the eternal truths. You could see young men, still happy and taking a fresh look at life ahead of them hurry there, and next to them serious men, matured through long experience and the seriousness of life, some still pretty strong and others obviously approaching the end of their days. All of them were driven by their one [important] concern for their soul and the seriousness of life with its task to strive for virtue, to cleanse themselves from sin and to learn the most important art,