 Reading time: 4 min.

The story of Ilodigwe Emmanuel Chekwube is that of a young Nigerian man who, raised in the faith, chose to answer a call greater than himself. A Salesian of Don Bosco, he left Nigeria to serve where the Congregation's presence was most fragile. From Liberia to Hungary, he faced the language barrier, cultural detachment, and the loneliness of a foreigner – not through his own strength, but with the certainty that He who sends, also provides. His story is a tangible testimony of missionary faith lived in the heart of Europe.

My name is Ilodigwe Emmanuel Chekwube. I come from Isuaniocha, in the Awka North local government area of Anambra State, Nigeria. I am the fifth of six children – four boys and two girls – and I grew up in a solid Catholic family where faith was a lived reality. This upbringing helped me to develop a personal and ever-deeper relationship with God.

I was surrounded by credible witnesses who guided me in my love for Jesus and in my spiritual growth. After my final school exams, feeling in my heart the desire to serve God and young people, I came into contact with the Salesians. In 2012, I made my first vows and, since then, my love for Don Bosco's charism has become even more deeply rooted.

Even during my post-novitiate – and before – I was struck by the fact that in various parts of the world, some Salesian houses were being closed due to a lack of confrères. This reality deeply challenged me and sparked in me the desire to make myself available for places where the Salesian presence was more fragile.

When I began to think seriously about the mission, my greatest fear was this, "What if they send me to a country where English isn't spoken? What will become of me?" The fear was real, but I didn't allow it to paralyse my response. After a time of intense prayer and discussion with some missionaries, I found the courage to apply for the missions.

My first request was accepted but, as the Province needed practical trainees, I was initially sent to an internal mission area, Liberia. After a year of service, I still felt the strong call *ad gentes* and I reapplied. This time I was assigned to Hungary, one of the smallest Provinces in the Congregation.

My fear became a reality. I arrived in a country where English was not spoken.

It wasn’t easy to settle into a completely new environment, where everything was different – the language, the climate, the culture, the food, the way of life. Adapting took time and patience. However, one certainty sustained me, my relationship with the One who sent me is greater than any difficulty. If the Lord calls me to serve in a new land, I am willing to start from scratch.

This is also the message I wish to share with those who are reading. When God calls you to something new, respond with trust. Be ready to start again. He never abandons those who entrust themselves to Him.

With this conviction, I learned to trust more, to be patient, and to commit myself seriously to studying the language. Hungarian was not easy, but with the help of God, my confrères, and the young people, I was able to learn it. There are still areas where I need to grow, but I recognise that it was not my own strength that sustained me, but His grace. He who sends also provides what is necessary for the mission.

I will soon celebrate ten years since my arrival in Hungary. Serving in this Province has been a rich and positive experience for me. In a European context marked by a decline in church attendance, Hungary remains a Country where the Church, the family, and the dignity of the person still hold significant social recognition. I thank God for allowing me to serve Him here.

Our Province is small. However, in mission, it is not primarily the quantity that counts, but the quality of presence and witness. It would certainly be a grace to welcome new missionaries, so as to expand our service to the young and the spread of God’s Kingdom.

The scarcity of numbers is a challenge, but it is not the greatest one. The deepest difficulty I perceive concerns the transmission of faith within families. Once, parents taught their children to pray and guided them on their Christian journey. Today, it sometimes happens that participation in church life is motivated only by school or sports activities. Sunday is at risk of becoming just another day. And yet, the time dedicated to God is what gives meaning and fulfilment to everything else. To keep the Lord’s day holy means to put God back at the centre.

So, what is my task as a Salesian missionary? It is to live the faith credibly and to re-evangelise, first and foremost, with my life. Young people today are not so much impressed by words as by consistency. If they see that what you proclaim matches

how you live, then they open themselves up to listening. I believe this is a privileged path for the re-evangelisation of Europe, tangible witness. To live in such a way that anyone can “read the Gospel” in your life. To represent Christ, not the ways of the world.

I currently live in the community of Péliföldszentkereszt with three confrères from India, Vietnam, and Hungary. I serve as a spiritual guide and religious education teacher in a Salesian secondary school. I consider it a true missionary frontier; many students do not come from practising families, but they are searching. They have questions; they long for meaning; they seek fullness.

My presence among them aims to be one of accompaniment, helping them to draw closer to Christ through listening, example, and patience. It is not always easy, especially when cultural or linguistic misunderstandings arise, but I try to live in humility, willing to learn and to teach. Our community also runs a youth club and has an intense parish life. Working together is a great gift; we sow the seeds, and we entrust the growth to God.

I would like to conclude by pointing out three pillars that sustain the mission: prayer, adoration, and pilgrimage. Without prayer, the mission loses its fruitfulness. The greatness of Don Bosco’s work was born from total entrustment to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. In silent adoration, I draw strength for the daily struggles; before Him, I find light, consolation, and renewed courage. He is the source of my joy. Pilgrimage, too, lived as a spiritual experience, strengthens the body and heart in faith.

This story of mine is also an invitation. Do not let fear silence the voice of God. If you feel the call to distant lands, set out with confidence. If your mission is local, be a missionary in your daily life. Every Christian, wherever they may be, is called to be a reflection of the light of Christ.

Fr. Ilodigwe Emmanuel Chekwube, SDB