

The mission has no borders: from East Timor to Japan

The Salesians arrived in Japan in 1927 and, thanks to the commitment of many missionaries, such as the venerable Vincenzo Cimatti, began to spread the Salesian charism in the Land of the Rising Sun. Local confreres, together with missionaries from other parts of the world, carry on the Salesian mission, also taking care of some migrant communities.

The Japan Province (GIA) has 70 Salesians in nine presences distributed across the islands of Honshū and Kyūshū. Various forms of apostolate are carried out in the Country, such as schools, parishes, oratories, social works, along with Salesian formation houses. An interesting pastoral field is the mission with some migrant communities present in the territory. We discuss this with Father Ambrósio Lucas da Silva, a Salesian priest from East Timor.

Father Ambrósio is 40 years old, Timorese, and comes from a family he describes as 'simple', with seven siblings. From childhood, he had contact with the Salesians primarily through Sunday Mass celebrated by Salesian missionaries in his village. In addition to the parish, his education was also carried out in schools run by the Salesians. But the true encounter happened in 2003, during the perpetual profession of a Salesian in the city of Fatumaca, which opened his heart to a path of discernment, thanks to the help and accompaniment of a young Salesian in formation, until he discovered God's will in his life.

After the first phase of discernment, Father Ambrósio carried out his novitiate in Fatumaca, professing as a Salesian on 24 July 2005. During his initial formation period, he travelled extensively: first, philosophy studies in Jakarta, Indonesia,

then back to East Timor for practical training, and finally, to Parañaque, Philippines, for theology. And it was precisely in the year that the local church of East Timor celebrated 500 years of evangelisation, on the 200th anniversary of Don Bosco's birth, that Father Ambrósio was ordained a priest in 2015, in Dili, the capital.

The Salesian presence in East Timor is contemporary with that in Japan and boasts a good vocational fervour for Salesian life. Dedicated to the martyr Saint Callistus Caravario, the Vice-Province has over 200 confreres and many young people who have followed the call to be missionaries in recent years. In addition to the local Tetum language, Portuguese is the official language, given Portugal's domination until 1975, but Indonesian and English are also known and very useful for work.

Immediately after his priestly ordination, Father Ambrósio was sent to carry out a special mission outside his country. For a short period of 3 years, he was to go to Japan to take care of the Brazilian migrant community, who are very present in the country. Over a hundred years ago, a large number of Japanese emigrated to Brazil in search of work; today, many of their descendants arrive in Japan with their families. Based on the agreement signed by Cardinal Virgilio do Carmo and Bishop Mario Yamanouchi, who were the superiors respectively of the Vice-Province of East Timor and the Province of Japan, this missionary journey for Father Ambrósio began in the winter of 2016.

It was not easy at all. "At the beginning of the first contract period, I had to struggle with extreme cold and with the languages, both Japanese and Portuguese. Living as a missionary in Japan for migrants is certainly not easy. You deal daily with different people, not only in terms of language, but also in character, timing, and the way they celebrate their faith," Father Ambrósio confesses to us.

Despite the challenges, thanks especially to the constant assistance and support of the Salesians and the local Provincial, integration occurred after a period of studying Japanese and Brazilian languages and cultures. Almost ten years have passed, and he continues his work as a collaborating priest in a Salesian parish in Hamamatsu and as a spiritual moderator (7 parishes and 2 chapels) for Brazilian migrants in Shizuoka Prefecture, in the Diocese of Yokohama. "I thank God for this beautiful and enriching pastoral experience, especially with migrants."

Evangelisation in Japan is not easy, but the Church is still seeking ways to proclaim the Gospel. In the past, missionaries succeeded through schools, a meeting place for many young people, but unfortunately, with a few exceptions, they have lost their missionary character, remaining important centres for culture and education. For this reason, after the great earthquake that struck eastern Japan in March 2011, the Church prioritised witnessing the Gospel visibly and explicitly through works of mercy, with the hope that many people touched by the spirit of the Gospel could effectively be led to the Church.

The most powerful evangelisation tool today is Catholic migrants, both families (descendants or married to Japanese) and young people who have come to live in Japan. The Catholic population in Japan has changed significantly in recent decades. The influx of foreign Catholics is changing the face of the Church in Japan, with some dioceses now having a majority of foreign members. According to the Archbishop of Tokyo, Cardinal Kikuchi, responding to the *Catholic News Agency*, an important task to prioritise is to encourage foreign citizens who have settled in Japan to become aware of their missionary vocation as Catholics.

Happy with this particular and demanding ministry, Father Ambrósio expresses hope for the future of the Church, which cannot ignore the contribution of migrants. "Aware of the

shortage of vocations, we hope that new vocations will also emerge from some migrant families.”

Marco Fulgaro