

SERRA in Asia



Issue No.4 • July 2011

Bangladesh • Hong Kong • India • Macau • Myanmar
Pakistan • Philippines • Singapore • Taiwan • Thailand

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The Year Ahead
by Serra International's First
Chinese President

Mark this date

8 September 2011

Serra Unites!

A Day of Prayer throughout
the Serra World

**Singapore Holds First Ever
Serra Eucharistic
Congress for Youth!**



The Year Ahead

Inaugural Speech of
Dr. Thomas Anthony Wong DC CMD
68th President of Serra International
Ottawa, Canada. 9 July 2011



Thomas and his wife, Flavia

My involvement with Serra International started with the Jubilee Pilgrimage to Rome in 2000 and then the preparation of our club's 40th anniversary. Since then, through experiencing many Conventions and activities, later serving as a trustee on the international board, I truly know Serra International is the global lay apostolate for vocations in the Catholic Church. I feel honored by the nominating committee and delegates' confirmation and all your confidence in electing me as the President of Serra International! Never before did I dream of this! Holy Spirit, PRAY continue to guide me, particularly for the YEAR ahead!

"Proposing vocations in Local Church"

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI sent out this message for the 48th World Day of Prayers for Vocation inviting us to reflect on the theme **"Proposing vocations in Local Church"**: That means having the courage, through an attentive and suitable concern for vocations, to point out this **challenging way** of following Christ. If we can provide a rich soil for the seeds of a priestly vocation, we can truly proclaim the Kingdom of God on earth.

In his message, His Holiness told us the importance of Prayer.

Prayer

According to Luke (*cf. Lk 6:12*), Jesus spent the night alone in prayer, listening to the will of the Father. It is Jesus' intimate conversation with the Father which resulted in the calling of his disciples. Throughout the Bible, Jesus always took time for prayer before his next important move.

The Eucharist and the Bible

His Holiness continued to point out the importance of

Message from Serra International's Vice President, Vocations and President of Serra Club of Singapore

My Dear Fellow Serrans,

Greetings in the Name of our Lord!

It took me almost 30 hours to travel to Ottawa for the Serra International Convention but it was a worthwhile and Spirit-filled trip. Not only was I inspired by the programme and the many Serrans from all over the world whom I met at the Convention, I was also very blessed to witness the installation of our second Asian President, Dr. Thomas Wong. As President Wong embarks on his term of office, I appeal to all of you to join me to offer a decade of the Holy Rosary every Thursday for him and the members of the Serra International Board 2011/2012. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide them to bring Serra International to a higher spiritual level. President Wong gave an edifying, yet witty address at the Banquet Dinner. In this issue, we are pleased to feature an excerpt of his address.

I am also pleased to inform you that the "Serra Unites!" initiative was also launched at the Convention. "Serra Unites!" is a day of prayer throughout the Serra world during which 20,000 Serrans in 1,160 Clubs in 46

countries on six continents unite our prayers for a more generous response on the part of those men called to the sacred priesthood as well as for the holiness of our priests and consecrated religious. It is also a day designated for Serrans to pray for God's abundant blessings on the works of Serra for vocations. "Serra Unites!" will be held on 8th September 2011 (Thursday) which is also the birthday of our Blessed Mother. Again, I appeal for your strong support of this initiative. Let's unite our prayers as one in the Body of Christ and invoke the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother. As St. Paul says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9.

Lastly, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Immediate Past President Tomi Asenuga for his strong leadership over the past 10 months. In his "State of Serra" address, he expressed his regret to all Asian Serrans for cancelling his trip to Asia at the last minute in view of the late return of his passport from an embassy. Let's pray and hope that we will have another opportunity to host him and his wife, Christine, in Asia.

God bless,

Sean Yeo

Vice President, Vocations, Serra International &
President, Serra Club of Singapore

** Please see the Serra International website for the full address of President Thomas Wong and the details of "Serra Unites!"



“As I am Serra International’s first Chinese President, I will focus on Asia together with Sean Yeo and our first Asian past President Chainarong Monthienvichienchai Asia will become one important part of our Serra family.”

the Eucharist and the Bible. These will help us to keep our gaze fixed on Jesus, growing close to him, listening to his word and encountering him in the sacraments.

Mary, Queen of Vocations

The excellent example of the Virgin Mary accepting God’s saving plan carries **a rich meaning for every Christian vocation**. With trust and perseverance let us invoke the aid of the Queen of Vocations, then we shall have her powerful intercession backing us.

As Serrans, in our work of fostering vocations, there is no more effective way than the daily practice of prayer, attending daily mass and reading the bible, reciting and meditating the Rosary with Mary, to ask her Son to extend His invitation to touch the hearts of young people and those whom He calls. I assure you, if we do all these, we will not only gather great spiritual power for the work of vocations, but at the same time also sanctify ourselves with purity of hearts.

Programs for 2011 -2012

Vocations

This year, I propose to start a unique International Vocation Project called **‘Serra Unites!’** which has been originally developed by the Singaporean Serrans. **‘Serra Unites!’** is a day of prayer throughout the Serra world for more priestly vocations as well as for our priests and religious.

We will be celebrating this program for the first time this year on September the 8th, the birthday of Our Blessed Mother. It will continue to be celebrated annually.

I also propose to have a Serrans’ World day of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for vocations on Good Shepherd Sunday; we need to be witnesses ourselves to pass the duty of Adoration as the torch of Serran Spirit goes around the world.

Programs

For programs, I think, as Serrans, we really need to be more conscientious in promoting vocations. I would like to see Serrans establish closer relationships with our local seminaries. We can set up Mentor Program to develop better communication with Serrans and seminarians on a one-to-one basis; furthermore, we may then be in a better position to look after their welfare too. We were able to successfully establish Mentor Program in Hong Kong.

I also would like to see, if we can set up Parish Vocation Groups, just as His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has been proposing that vocations really come from the local church level. This would entail signing up parishioners as friends of Serra to pray, to set up adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in their parish, and to offer masses for vocations. Vice President for Program, Dolores de

Aragon, is ready to help out in this effort.

Membership

For Membership, I hope to see a membership drive. As suggested by the Vice President for Membership, Daniel Grady, we will promote a ‘Called by Name’ program, in which, individual Serra members personally invite other Catholics that they know to ‘check Serra out’ just like Christ personally called his disciples. I challenge each club, to increase by at least one member by the end of this year. So, a sort of competition is on and whoever has the most membership increase will be appropriately recognized at our next international convention.

Communication

Communication is important for the growth of Serra. Our Vice President from Chile, Fernando Cavada Guzman, will deploy advanced technology to issue the Bellringers to every member around the world. I promise to send our message from the Board at least once every quarter.

I will commission our Past Serra International Presidents to be Ambassadors of the Board of Trustees to communicate with all clubs, so that information can be given as well as the voice and the needs of each one of you can be heard. In addition, each trustee will do the work for the area they belong to.

I will ask the Immediate Past President Tomi Asenuga and Trustee Patrick Ugbana to continue their good work to spreading Serra across the continent of Africa.

As I am Serra International’s first Chinese President, I will focus on Asia together with Sean Yeo and our first Asian past President Chainarong Monthienvichienchai Asia will become one important part of our Serra family. I am looking forward to participate in the 16th Serra Asian Convention in Macau on April 20 – 22 next year. All are welcome.

Canonization of our Patron

Last but not least, we need to continue to pray hard for the canonization of our Patron, Blessed Junipero Serra. We are just one miracle short.

My brothers and sisters, we must also remember the teachings of Blessed John Paul II, on the occasion of our Jubilee pilgrimage in Rome on 7 Dec 2000. He stated:

Dear Serrans, Never forget that yours must be above all a commitment to prayer, prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful key to resolving the vocations question.

Mary, Mother of Vocations, pray for us!

Be Empowered to be HOLY!

Serra Club of Singapore organizes Eucharistic Congress for Youth



With the aim of fostering a deeper love and appreciation of the Eucharist among the Catholic youths of Singapore, the Serra Club of Singapore has organised the Serra Eucharistic Congress 2011, held at the Church of the Holy Cross from 1 to 3 July 2011. The congress, which was unprecedented in the Archdiocese of Singapore, saw a large turnout of around 200 youths from the various parishes of Singapore. On top of that, there were also some 14 youths from Malaysia who participated in this congress. The theme of the congress is "Be Empowered to be Holy". Two prominent priests from overseas, Fr. Antoine Thomas C.S.J. and Fr. Clement Machado S.O.L.T., were invited to be the main speakers for the congress.

Fr. Antoine Thomas from the Congregation of St. John, is the founder of the worldwide movement of Children's Eucharistic Adoration. He has inspired many youths worldwide through events organised for youths, such as the Youth 2000 retreats throughout the US. He founded "Children of Hope", a children's Eucharistic Adoration Program which is carried out in parishes and Catholic schools around the world. During the congress, Fr. Antoine spoke about attaining holiness through the Eucharist and frequent Confession. He spoke about the importance of having a fervent love for the Eucharist and encouraged the youths to encounter Jesus and spend more time with Him through the frequent reception of the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Confession. He also stressed the need for daily prayer and Eucharistic Adoration in

order for one to draw closer to our loving Creator. Fr. Antoine also led the Holy Hour prayer sessions, where he guided the participants in Eucharistic Adoration through meditative prayers and songs, readings from passages of the Bible, as well as periods of silent prayer and reflection in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

The other distinguished speaker for the congress is Fr. Clement Machado, S.O.L.T. Fr. Clement is a Canadian-born exorcist-priest from the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, and is currently based in Rome. A powerful and dynamic speaker, Fr. Clement has an international evangelisation ministry and has hosted a series of programmes on Vatican Radio and EWTN. During the congress, Fr. Clement spoke on the seven deadly sins, focusing on lust and its corresponding and often neglected virtue of chastity and purity to counter this sin. Fr. Clement stressed not just on spiritual purity but physical purity - that of the mind, heart, soul, eyes, and body, essentially the whole person as he pointed out that what is expressed inwardly is expressed outwardly. This leads to the importance of modesty in the way we dress since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He also enlightened the participants on the dangers of the New Age and occult practices, such as, among others, consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm-reading, yoga, consulting mediums, ancestral worship, and acupuncture. He also spoke to the participants about discerning God's Will for each one of us in our lives. Fr. Clement also laid his hands and prayed over

each and every participant on the second day of the congress.

During the first Mass of the congress on 2 July 2011, His Grace, Archbishop Nicholas Chia, blessed a handbook of prayers and essentials of the Catholic Faith compiled by the Serra Club of Singapore. This handbook is a collection of prayers for various occasions and intentions, which also includes a guide on the recitation of the Holy Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. The handbook also contained information on the fundamentals of the Church's teaching, with content such as the seven sacraments, sacramentals, indulgences, the four last things, as well as information on prayer and Eucharistic Adoration. This handbook was distributed to all participants to serve as a guide for living out the faith as good Catholic youths.

Many youths who took part in the congress were inspired by the speakers and found the content very useful and relevant. One such participant was Daniel Tay, 22, from the parish of Queen of Peace, who felt that the congress was "very edifying". "The congress raised awareness on the importance of the Eucharist and the need to be more devoted to Eucharistic Adoration." Daniel also noted that "most of us receive the Eucharist every Sunday, but we do not appreciate the power of the Holy Eucharist until we hear from an exorcist about the snares and schemes of the Devil, and how the Eucharist has the power to guard us from evil." Regarding the speakers, Daniel felt that

they were "very honest", and the content they spoke about was "the hard truth – things people would not like listening to." The congress has made him realise that "attaining holiness is not easy, as following the plan of God requires a lot of effort and trust." Daniel felt inspired after the congress. "It (the congress) has sparked a desire for me to put more effort into enriching my spiritual life. I am touched by their (Fr. Antoine and Fr. Clement) love for the Eucharist, especially when Fr. Clement stared at the Host during Mass for a long time with great reverence."

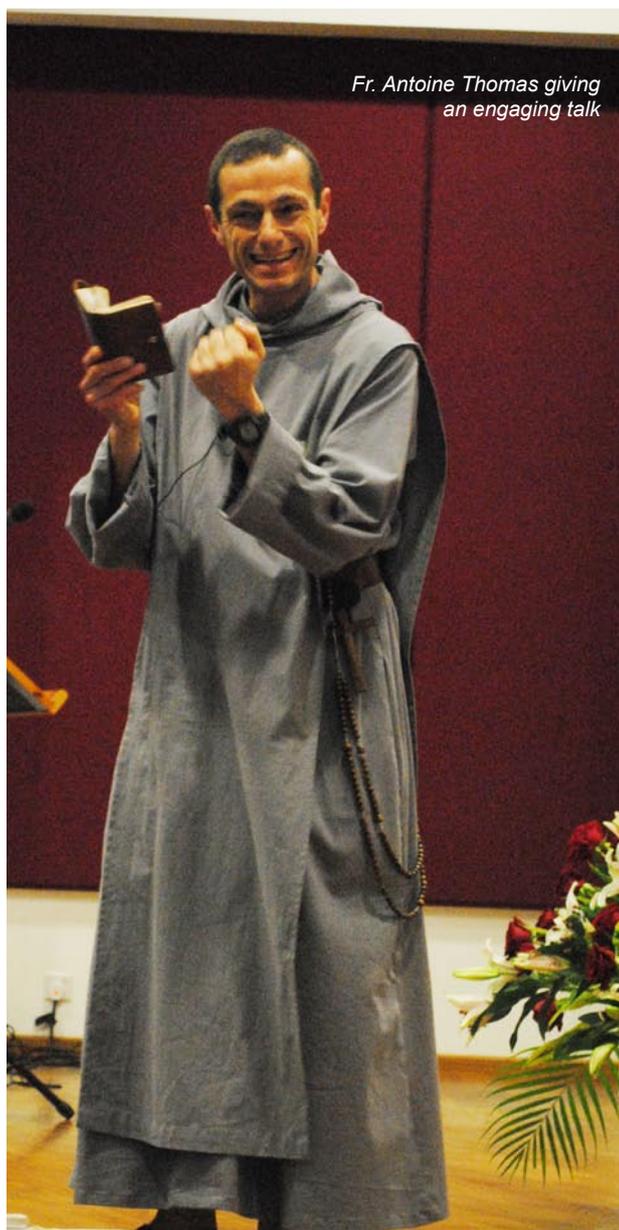
Francis Lee, 17, from the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, can relate to many points raised by the speakers. Francis shared that like many youths, there are many occasions where he is caught up with many commitments and cannot find the time to pray. The congress has made him realise the importance of the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration and provided him with a new perspective on prayer and spiritual life as a Catholic youth. Inspired by the congress, Francis shared that there are "a lot of things in his lifestyle (which needs to be) changed". After the congress, Francis strives to "allocate time for prayer", and to "pray as often as possible".



Archbishop Nicholas Chia with participants



Fr. Clement Machado placing a brown scapular on a participant



Fr. Antoine Thomas giving an engaging talk

True Devotion to Mary

Part 3: Wonderful Effects of True Devotion to Mary

(Excerpts from the Writings of Saint Louis de Montfort)



Knowledge of our unworthiness

By the light that the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, His faithful spouse, you will perceive the evil inclinations of your fallen nature and how incapable you are of any good apart from that which God produces in you as Author of nature and of grace. As a consequence of this knowledge you will despise yourself and think of yourself only as an object of repugnance. You will consider yourself as a snail that soils everything with its slime, as a toad that poisons everything with its venom, as a malevolent serpent seeking only to deceive. Finally, the humble Virgin Mary will share her humility with you so that, although you regard yourself with distaste and desire to be disregarded by others, you will not look down slightly upon anyone.

A share in Mary's faith

Mary will share her faith with you. Her faith on earth was stronger than that of all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints. Now that she is reigning in heaven she no longer has this faith, since she sees everything clearly in God by the light of glory. However, with the consent of Almighty God she did not lose it when entering heaven. She has preserved it for her faithful servants in the Church militant. Therefore the more you gain the friendship of this noble Queen and faithful Virgin the more you will be inspired by faith in your daily life. It will cause you to depend less upon sensible and extraordinary feelings. For it is a lively faith animated by love enabling you to do everything from no other motive than that of pure love. It is a firm faith, unshakable as a rock, prompting you to remain firm and steadfast in the midst of storms and tempests. It is an active and probing faith which like some mysterious pass-key admits you into the mysteries of Jesus Christ and of man's final destiny and into the very heart of God Himself. It is a courageous faith, which inspires you to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and the salvation of souls. Lastly, this faith will be your flaming torch, your very life with God, your secret fund of divine Wisdom, and an all-powerful weapon for you to enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. It inflames those who are lukewarm and need the gold of fervent love. It restores life to those who are dead through sin. It moves and transforms hearts of marble and cedars of Lebanon by gentle and convincing argument. Finally, this faith will strengthen you to resist the devil and the other enemies of salvation.

The gift of pure love

The Mother of fair love will rid your heart of all scruples and inordinate servile fear. She will open and enlarge it to obey the commandments of her Son with alacrity and with the holy freedom of the children of God. She will fill your heart with pure love of which she is the treasury. You will then cease to act as you did before, out of fear of the God who is love, but rather out of pure love. You will look upon Him as a loving Father and endeavor to please Him at all times. You will speak trustfully to Him as a child does to its father. If you should have the misfortune to offend Him you will abase yourself

before Him and humbly beg His pardon. You will offer your hand to Him with simplicity and lovingly rise from your sin. Then, peaceful and relaxed and buoyed up with hope you will continue on your way to Him.

Great confidence in God and in Mary

Our Blessed Lady will fill you with unbounded confidence in God and in herself:

Because you will no longer approach Jesus by yourself but always through Mary, your loving Mother.

Since you have given her all your merits, graces and satisfactions to dispose of as she pleases, she imparts to you her own virtues and clothes you in her own merits. So you will be able to say confidently to God: "Behold Mary, your handmaid, be it done unto me according to your word."

Since you have now given yourself completely to Mary, body and soul, she, who is generous to the generous, and more generous than even the kindest benefactor, will in return give herself to you in a marvelous but real manner. Indeed you may without hesitation say to her, "I am yours, O Blessed Virgin, obtain salvation for me," or with the beloved disciple, St. John, "I have taken you, Blessed Mother, for my all." Or again you may say with St. Bonaventure, "Dear Mother of saving grace, I will do everything with confidence and without fear because you are my strength and my boast in the Lord," or in another place, "I am all yours and all that I have is yours, O glorious Virgin, blessed above all created things. Let me place you as a seal upon my heart, for your love is as strong as death." Or adopting the sentiments of the prophet, "Lord, my heart has no

"... Since you have given her all your merits, graces and satisfactions to dispose of as she pleases, she imparts to you her own virtues and clothes you in her own merits. So you will be able to say confidently to God: "Behold Mary, your handmaid, be it done unto me according to your word."

reason to be exalted nor should my looks be proud; I have not sought things of great moment nor wonders beyond my reach; nevertheless, I am still not humble. But I have roused my soul and taken courage. I am as a child, weaned from earthly pleasures and resting on its mother's breast. It is upon this breast that all good things come to me."

What will still further increase your confidence in her is that, after having given her in trust all that you possess to use or keep as she pleases, you will place less trust in yourself and much more in her whom you have made your treasury. How comforting and how consoling when a person can say, "The treasury of God, where

he has placed all that he holds most precious, is also my treasury." "She is," says a saintly man, "the treasury of the Lord."

Communication of the spirit of Mary

The soul of Mary will be communicated to you to glorify the Lord. Her spirit will take the place of yours to rejoice in God, her Savior, but only if you are faithful to the practices of this devotion. As St. Ambrose says, "May the soul of Mary be in each one of us to glorify the Lord! May the spirit of Mary be in each one of us to rejoice in God!" "When will that happy day come," asks a saintly man of our own day whose life was completely wrapped up in Mary, "when God's Mother is enthroned in men's hearts as Queen, subjecting them to the dominion of her great and princely Son? When will souls breathe Mary as the body breathes air?" When that time comes wonderful things will happen on earth. The Holy Spirit, finding His dear Spouse present again in souls, will come down into them with great power. He will fill them with His gifts, especially wisdom, by which they will produce wonders of grace. My dear friend, when will that happy time come, that age of Mary, when many souls, chosen by Mary and given her by the most High God, will hide themselves completely in the depths of her soul, becoming living copies of her, loving and glorifying Jesus? That day will dawn only when the devotion I teach is understood and put into practice. Ut adveniat regnum tuum, adveniat regnum Mariae: "Lord, that your kingdom may come, may the reign of Mary come!"

Transformation into the likeness of Jesus

If Mary, the Tree of Life, is well cultivated in our soul by fidelity to this devotion, she will in due time bring forth her fruit which is none other than Jesus. I have seen many devout souls searching for Jesus in one way or another, and so often when they have worked hard throughout the night, all they can say is, "Despite our having worked all night, we have caught nothing." To them we can say, "You have worked hard and gained little; Jesus can only be recognized faintly in you." But if we follow the immaculate path of Mary, living the devotion that I teach, we will always work in daylight, we will work in a holy place, and we will work but little. There is no darkness in Mary; not even the slightest shadow since there was never any sin in her. She is a holy place, a holy of holies, in which saints are formed and molded.

Please note that I say that saints are molded in Mary. There is a vast difference between carving a statue by blows of hammer and chisel and making a statue by using a mold. Sculptors and statue-makers work hard and need plenty of time to make statues by the first method. But the second method does not involve much work and takes very little time. St. Augustine speaking to our Blessed Lady says, "You are worthy to be called the mold of God." Mary is a mold capable of forming people into the image of the God-man. Anyone who is cast into this divine mold is quickly shaped and molded into Jesus and Jesus into him. At little cost and in a short time he will become Christ-like

since he is cast into the very same mold that fashioned a God-man.

I think I can very well compare some spiritual directors and devout persons to sculptors who wish to produce Jesus in themselves and in others by methods other than this. Many of them rely on their own skill, ingenuity and art and chip away endlessly with mallet and chisel at hard stone or badly-prepared wood, in an effort to produce a likeness of our Lord. At times, they do not manage to produce a recognizable likeness either because they lack knowledge and experience of the person of Jesus or because a clumsy stroke has spoiled the whole work. But those who accept this little-known secret of grace, which I offer them, can rightly be compared to smelters and molders who have discovered the beautiful mold of Mary where Jesus was so divinely and so naturally formed. They do not rely on their own skill but on the perfection of the mold. They cast and lose themselves in Mary where they become true models of her Son.

You may think this a beautiful and convincing comparison. But how many understand it? I would like you, my dear friend, to understand it. But remember that only molten and liquefied substances may be poured into a mold. That means that you must crush and melt down the old Adam in you if you wish to acquire the likeness of the new Adam in Mary.

(Continued on Page 8)



True Devotion to Mary

(Continued from page 6)

The greater glory of Christ

If you live this devotion sincerely, you will give more glory to Jesus in a month than in many years of a more demanding devotion. Here are my reasons for saying this:

Since you do everything through the Blessed Virgin as required by this devotion, you naturally lay aside your own intentions no matter how good they appear to you. You abandon yourself to our Lady's intentions even though you do not know what they are. Thus you share in the high quality of her intentions, which are so pure that she gave more glory to God by the smallest of her actions, say, twirling her distaff, or making a stitch, than did St. Lawrence suffering his cruel martyrdom on the grid-iron, and even more than all the saints together in all their most heroic deeds! Mary amassed such a multitude of merits and graces during her sojourn on earth that it would be easier to count the stars in heaven, the drops of water in the ocean or the sands of the sea-shore than count her merits and graces. She thus gave more glory to God than all the angels and saints have given or will ever give him. Mary, wonder of God, when souls abandon themselves to you, you cannot but work wonders in them!

In this devotion we set no store on our own thoughts and actions but are content to rely on Mary's dispositions when approaching and even speaking to Jesus. We then act with far greater humility than others who imperceptibly rely on their own dispositions and are self-satisfied about them; and consequently we give greater glory to God, for perfect glory is given to him only by the lowly and humble of heart.



Our Blessed Lady, in her immense love for us, is eager to receive into her virginal hands the gift of our actions, imparting to them a marvelous beauty and splendor, and presenting them herself to Jesus most willingly. More glory is given to our Lord in this way than when we make our offering with our own guilty hands.

Lastly, you never think of Mary without Mary thinking of God for you. You never praise or honour Mary without Mary joining you in praising and honoring God. Mary is entirely relative to God. Indeed I would say that she was relative only to God, because she exists uniquely in reference to Him.

She is an echo of God, speaking and repeating only God. If you say "Mary" she says "God". When St. Elizabeth praised Mary calling her blessed because she had believed, Mary, the faithful echo of God, responded with her canticle, "My soul glorifies the Lord." What Mary did on that day, she does every day. When we praise her, when we love and honour her, when we present anything to her, then God is praised, honored and loved and receives our gift through Mary and in Mary.

To be continued in next issue...

'To Save A Thousand Souls'

Weekend Retreat For Young Single Catholic Men Who Are Interested To Discern The Diocesan Priesthood
Conducted by **Father Brett Brannen**

Fr. Brett Brannen is one of the most successful vocation directors in the United States and served as the vice-rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, MD over the last six years. He is widely known as a powerful speaker and an expert in priestly formation.

Fr. Brannen was ordained in 1991 for the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia, and served as Vocation Director beginning in 1993. During his tenure, the number of seminarians dramatically expanded from five to 28 men. By 2007, Savannah caught the attention of the national press as it ordained the second-highest number of priest per capita of any diocese in the country.

Fr. Brannen has given over 30 parish missions and retreats to seminarians, priests, and religious orders. He has appeared on EWTN, published several booklets on the priesthood, and released an audio series on how to discern a diocesan vocation.

TO SAVE A THOUSAND SOULS

A Weekend Retreat for Young Single Catholic Men Who are Interested to Discern the Diocesan Priesthood

Conducted by:

Father Brett A. Brannen
Author of 'To Save a Thousand Souls - A Guide for Discerning a Vocation to Diocesan Priesthood'

Father Alex Chua
Vocation Director
Archdiocese of Singapore

30 September 2011 (Friday), 7pm to 2 October 2011 (Sunday), 5pm
At the St. Francis Xavier Major Seminary
199 Punggol 17th Ave, Singapore 829645

Stay-in retreat for single Catholic men ages 18 to 35
Registration form is available at
www.serrasingapore.org

Organized by the Serra Club of Singapore

