



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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To the Ends of the Earth and Back (Thank God)



Fr. Jordan Bradshaw, OP

Dear Mission Friends:

A major goal since beginning my post as director of the Dominican Mission Foundation last year has been to visit and experience first-hand as many of the missions we support as possible, especially the ones where our Dominican friars serve as missionaries. In October I had an inspiring and productive—and relatively safe—trip to San Cristobal and Ocosingo, Chiapas, where I visited and said Mass at both the beautiful, ancient landmark Dominican churches as well as the rugged and remote but warm and welcoming mountain chapels; I sat in on meetings about new building projects; and I met some impoverished but wonderful and somehow joyful parishioners.

My most recent work trip was to our mission parish of Holy Family Cathedral in Anchorage, Alaska.



Last fall, when the pastor, Fr. Steven Maekawa, O.P. asked if I would be interested in coming to Alaska to celebrate and preach at the Christmas Masses for St. Theresa's Church, one of three remote mission churches in the diocesan parish of Holy Rosary based in Dillingham, this one serving the bush communities of King Salmon and Naknek, I jumped at the opportunity.

Fr. Scott Garrett, pastor of Holy Rosary, called to say he would be arranging the details for my visit and to thank me, and I told him I was happy to be able to help out. **Priests from the various parishes in Alaska frequently and readily assist each other because there are so few resident priests and so many small remote churches to cover.** I was soon to learn, however, that with Alaska and its vast, imposing terrain and extremes of weather, one must remain flexible.

Alaska is twice the size of Texas but its population of 750,000 is just a fraction of the Lone Star state's 30 million.

The area's winter weather averages -16 with a wind chill of -30. The first snows arrive at the end of October and even the sea is frozen for several months! Due to their rugged, icy terrain and almost perpetually foul weather, many outlying and isolated native settlements scattered throughout the state and up and down the Bering Sea coastline remain underdeveloped and unconnected by roads and are physically isolated from the outside world except for an airfield or a boat landing. And those communities that are on the road network are often hundreds of miles away from the next town.

Parishioners go for long periods of time without Mass or the sacraments or the counseling of a priest in time of need. A few villages have Masses once a month but once a year has been the rule for most, and they feel quite abandoned by the Church.

A primary concern of both the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the Diocese of Fairbanks has long been the inability to send priests to these parishes on a regular basis. A few years ago, the friars of our mission parish of Holy Family Cathedral in Anchorage, with the permission of our Western Dominican Province, made a commitment to tighten up on their schedule, allowing time for them to travel more regularly to some of these nearly-abandoned towns on a rotating basis. They also implemented a plan to encourage our friars stationed outside of Alaska to tighten up on their schedules and to come and assist the parish in any of their free time, particularly during the busy Christmas and Easter seasons.

And it followed that the director of the Mission Office at the time, Fr. Martin Walsh, OP, pledged the Foundation's support of this plan in these efforts to extend our ministry to as many of the isolated Catholic communities as possible and as often as possible.

Not long after, Fr. Martin himself flew up as a visiting priest to take the Masses and pastoral duties in Dutch Harbor/Unalaska, which is home to the only Catholic parish in the 1,000 mile long chain of Aleutian Islands. But it was March of 2020, and after flying the 800 miles through frightening snow, rain, and wind from Anchorage out to the islands, he was met with the news that all Masses and services had been cancelled indefinitely due to something called the coronavirus. After we learned more about the virus, and parishes reopened with appropriate protocols, Holy Family pastor Fr. Steven and his staff of friars got back on track.

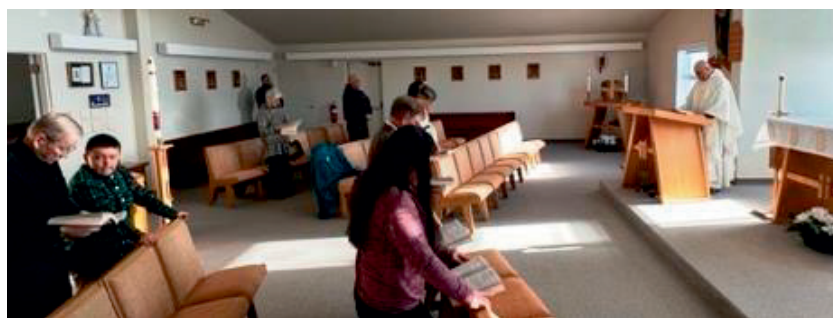
Their plan for themselves and several visiting Dominicans to cover the 2021 Christmas services for numerous remote parishes proved highly successful. Our commitment to bringing the sacraments of the Church to the people of Alaska has now radiated to the far reaches of the state, and the presence of a priest is always greatly anticipated and appreciated. Today our Dominican priests try to make trips on a rotating basis to such "priestless" villages as Dutch Harbor/Unalaska, Trapper Creek, Talkeetna, and Glennallen. We also do our best to fulfill special requests for relief from local clergy, as I was hoping to do for Fr. Scott.

The terms "must remain flexible," "try," "do our best" are purposefully chosen because, in Alaska, even without the fear of Covid now, we are subject to the unpredictable and dominant whims of nature.

This past December 22, 2022, when I was scheduled to fly from Anchorage to King Salmon for St. Theresa's Christmas services, the weather kept the plane grounded three separate times, and my time frame for leaving came and went. Disappointed, I was at least able to assist my busy Dominican brothers in Anchorage with their Christmas Masses and extra duties, and for that I was grateful.

Before leaving for Seattle, however, Fr. Scott called me again and asked if I would return for Holy Week and Easter 2023, and I accepted his request immediately.





But having now experienced first-hand the overwhelming power of the weather, I was nervous—about flying *and* driving. The closest this born-and-bred Arizona boy had ever come to snow was looking at the serene, beautiful images I saw in magazines and Christmas cards.

In preparing for my trip, I learned that Fr. Scott, an experienced bush pilot, flies his Cherokee airplane over 30 miles to cover his parish, Holy Rosary, which is the longest in the world and larger than the state of Maine. On its website, the parish's motto is short and direct: "Flying the Gospels to the Ends of the Earth." Each trip, however, is new, potentially dangerous, and not to be taken for granted. Fr. Scott related how a good friend of his was flying down the Aleutian chain when his plane iced up and fell out of the sky. Fortunately, he survived with just some broken bones and frost bite, but at the news Fr. Scott felt sick to his stomach and couldn't fly for two weeks. His predecessor as pastor, however, was not so lucky.

In 2002, Fr. Kelly died when his plane went down on his way to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass in the remote village of Togiak. At St. Theresa's I saw mementos of Fr. Kelly—his ski shoes in a glass box at the foot of the ambo and photos with parishioners hanging in the chapel and the parish hall. Fr. Scott keeps a small figurine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a gift he received from a Guatemalan woman, hanging in the plane, and of course he prays before and during each trip for a safe arrival.

Between King Salmon and Naknek is St. Theresa's, 294 miles southwest of Anchorage in a remote area that can only be reached by small plane to King Salmon's tiny airport. Needless to say, I was quite relieved when, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, we touched ground; but new fears arose, knowing that for five days I would have to drive and live in the cold, icy, winter weather and spend much of my time alone. I was met by one of the parishioners who, rather than driving me to St. Theresa's as I had hoped, instead showed me to Fr. Scott's car, in the airport parking lot, that I would be using during my time there. I drove the six miles as if I were 16 again and taking my driver's test, but when the small and simple but beautiful blue chapel came into view, I felt at peace.

I realized, however, that my experience of the Triduum here would be markedly different—and in many ways disorienting—from any in my 30 years as a priest. The churches where I have served as pastor or director of campus ministry have been much larger than St. Theresa's. To put it in perspective, attendance at one 9:30 am Mass at my former parish in Antioch, California, for example, could be twice the size of the entire population of both villages of King Salmon and Naknek, which is about 700, and certainly much greater than the total attending all three days of Holy Week services at St. Theresa's.

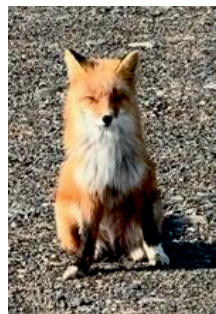
Six people attended the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Thursday, and while I did not have the traditional number of twelve people participating in the washing of feet, I did have twelve feet over which I could pour water! After, they all welcomed and thanked me for being with them this time of the year, without which they would, as usual, have had to miss out on the most important three days of the liturgical year; and their celebration of Easter Sunday itself would have been delayed two weeks while they waited for their turn with Fr. Scott.

The same six people returned on Good Friday to hear the Passion, kneel and venerate the cross, and receive Holy Communion.

Fr. Scott had not scheduled an Easter Vigil on Saturday, so I decided I would celebrate it *by myself* and offer it for the people of St. Theresa's. Alone, except for the fox who was always just outside, I blessed a small fire the size of a salad bowl, processed with the Easter Candle into the chapel, sang the Exultet, read and listened to myself retelling our salvation history, sang the Gloria (during which the fox ran off), blessed the water, and offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Eighteen faithful attended the Easter Sunday Mass to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection, listening to the powerful readings, renewing baptismal promises, and being nourished with the beautiful gift of the Eucharist. I stayed after Mass to visit with the people I had met and thanked them for venturing out from their safe and cozy homes to welcome me and participate in their faith, a faith that they maintained and kept strong mostly by themselves. I was humbled by that just as I was by their faith in each other: When I was first taken to Fr. Scott's car at the airport, it was unlocked and the keys were under a floor mat; later, when I arrived at the church, I saw that its entrance was also unlocked. I was surely a long way from Seattle! In saying goodbye to them I had a silent hope that I would be returning sometime in the near future to help Fr. Scott once again.

I returned to Anchorage that Monday, filled with many memories of my incredible experience. I had gone on morning walks to see as much of the surrounding area that my time and energy would allow, during which I would reflect on the reason I became a priest.



It was at a very young age that I felt God calling me to serve Him, celebrate Mass, and offer His Body and Blood to His people. In His Son, God has shown us that love is not about ourselves but about others—not about what we get but what we give. Christ invites us to sacrifice our own wants, and sometimes our own needs, out of care for one another. When He took up His cross and gave His life, he showed us that the fullest expression of love is found in a willingness to give everything. **I became a Dominican to preach that God is deeply in love with each and every one of us.**

I remember reflecting too about my reason for so readily agreeing to undertake this fearful trip for the sake of so few parishioners, which led me to remember with amazement my Dominican brothers who serve all year long in the remote villages of Alaska, Baja California, Chiapas, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico. In my clumsy prayers and reflections, I gained a deeper appreciation and a greater respect for their ministry to tirelessly and selflessly preach the Gospel and celebrate the Sacraments daily with and among the people of God.

The financial support and prayers from you, our Mission Friends, allow and encourage our Dominican missionaries to continue the good work they provide. Please pray for the well being of the people they serve and for their safety and that of all priests as they travel by way of often treacherous roads or precarious flights.

I am profoundly grateful to everyone who made my trip possible. Besides the shortage of priests who are able to undertake such assignments, the risk and danger of flying itself in that part of the world make it quite expensive, costing Fr. Scott, for example, more than \$16,000 per year to reach the missions of his parish. Thank you for your support of our ministry through the Mission Office as we endeavor to bring the Eucharist to all of the faithful in Alaska throughout the year.

In Christ's peace,

Fr. Jordan Bradshaw, O.P.



This just in...

We have just received the joyful news that Fr. Steven Maekawa, OP, pastor of Holy Family Mission Parish based in Anchorage, has been appointed by Pope Francis to be Bishop of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Congratulations and warm wishes, Bishop-elect Maekawa!

Upcoming Mission Appeals

Aug. 5-6: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Rowland Heights, *Fr. Tim Conlan*
Aug. 12-13: St. Anthony, Long Beach, *Fr. Alejandro Crosthwaite*
Aug. 19-20: St. Teresa of Avila, Carson City, *Fr. Tim Conlan*;
 St. Dominic, San Francisco, *Fr. Martin Walsh, OP*;
 St. Cecilia, Los Angeles, *Fr. Alejandro Crosthwaite*
Aug. 26-27: Corpus Christi, Carson City, *Fr. Michael Fones*