



# FRIENDS



**The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle**  
*Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor since 1958.*

**December  
2025**



***"The Ministry of Presence..."***

***Dear Friends,***

In this issue we hear from Fr. Matt Anscombe, of the Diocese of Clifton, UK, who featured in the September issue of the newsletter. Since Fr. Matt's arrival in Peru, he has been busy, becoming acquainted with several of our parishes, where he has been working:

***Back*** in the UK every Christmas there are so many seasonal songs that get played on the radio or in shops. Christmas songs are everywhere. They invade the brain, like earworms! One very famous song, which can be heard everywhere constantly and is dangerously catchy is --





*"I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day".* Released in 1973 by the glam rock band, Wizzard, it reflects on the wonder of the classic expectation of children, for the coming of Santa Claus. It also makes lots of references to snow and ice and getting cosy around a winter fire. Images typical of Christmas, in the heart of winter in the northern hemisphere. However, as I write this in Lima, Peru, and as Christmas approaches, we certainly won't have a white Christmas. This will be the first time I have experienced Christmas outside of my own country; in the southern hemisphere, we are heading towards the height of summer. I arrived in Peru about twelve weeks ago. I reflected in my article in September, prior to setting out on this journey, that I did not know quite where I was going – mostly in the sense that any missionary journey is somehow a leap of faith. Arriving here

was, in many ways, a step into the unknown. I also suggested in that article that I might be able to give a slightly deeper reflection after several weeks of being here. While I am not sure I can honour that suggestion, I can at least share some of my initial experiences! Perhaps as a backdrop to this, we might hold in our minds and hearts, not the classic Christmas picture of Jesus in the manger, but the wonderful Johannine text from Chapter 1 (15:16). which sometimes gets overlooked at Christmas:

*"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth..... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."*

**A**nd so, I arrived in Lima on Monday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, genuinely wondering in the back of my mind, *"What is going on? What am I doing here?"* The intention was to take it easy for a couple of weeks and settle in to our mother house in the Lima suburb of Barranco, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was suggested that I fly up to Cusco and get the "touristy stuff" (Machu Pichu and more) out of the way. However, the Parish Priest in Ate had found himself alone and in need of assistance, since another priest had moved on to another appointment. So, I was thrown into the deep-end on my first weekend, and joined Fr. Nilton for six weeks in Ate. Ate is an area where dogs constantly bark, overly loud air horns honk continually from buses, and large garbage trucks clang out noisy jingles encouraging people to bring their rubbish out to the street. Little moto-taxis careen around tooting their horns.

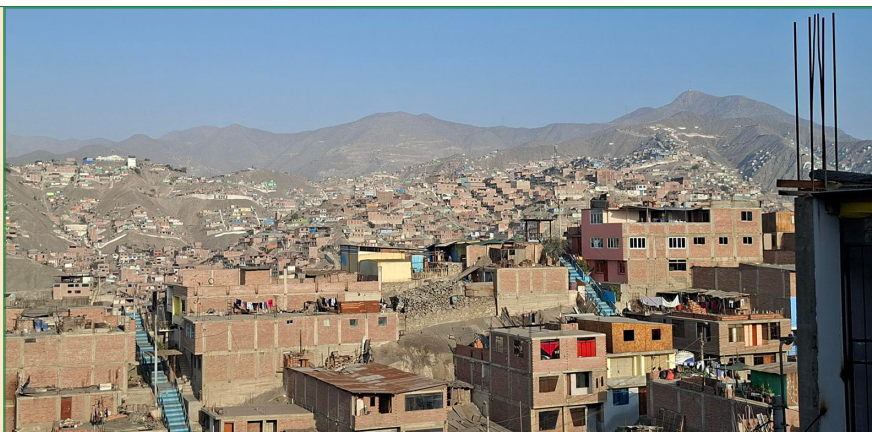
*¡Mucha bulla!* (a lot of racket!) as another missionary had warned me. *"There's even an outdoor event hall beside the presbytery"*, he said. This priest continued, *"On a Saturday night there's overly loud music that will rip through the neighbourhood until 5am. Good luck if you're on the 7 AM Mass."*





Welcome to the barrio of Amauta B in the district of Ate-Vitarte. Welcome to the Parish of El Resucitado (The Risen One), serving fourteen communities within its parish boundaries in the Diocese of Chosica. There I was at 7 AM on my first Sunday in a surprisingly green park, in a poor area of Lima, having an out of body experience! Plinky, plonky music was being played on an electric piano. Hills rose in the immediate background covered with makeshift-like dwellings precariously perched on the sides of the hill. Sounds of an adjacent market and barking dogs surrounded us. Many faces around me were of those who had immigrated to Lima from the high Andean villages; many had come in the late 1980s or early 1990s to escape the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path Communist group) and the terrorism they imposed, in the country. They had come also to get away from the real hardships of rural life in the tough conditions of the Sierra. Here was I, a *gringo* (that is usually an affectionate term depending on the tone!), who stuck out like a sore thumb, wondering 'How did I get here? What on earth is going on?' I have also been affectionately called *Padre Gringuito*! It is interesting how quickly one can adapt to one's environment. At least, this fortunately seemed to be the case for me. However, I did still experience some culture shock, along the line. There was some surprise that I, as a foreign missionary, had arrived with sufficient Spanish to get by. I really can not imagine how much more challenging it must be to arrive with zero Spanish. I have such respect for those who have done so! It is challenging enough to adapt to the culture, without having a total language barrier. I must admit, however, that I feel self-conscious when I don't understand what someone is asking me, especially teenagers. I feel like a prize plum at times! However, one has to make oneself vulnerable and that isn't easy. It has increased my humility since I am outside my comfort zone. As I have said on several occasions to different communities, *'I've been a priest for 15 years but here I feel like I was ordained just yesterday.'*

The economic mix in the parish is quite varied: some middle income; many low-mid income; a lot of poor and a very high number of extreme poverty, who live high up on the 'cerros', the 'hills' that surround the area. Many people work in low-income roles in Lima. Many take buses into the city early in







the morning and return in the late evening. It's a tough existence. Crime is a big concern in Lima. Extortion is a considerable issue, too. Imagine having a little business which is just ticking over and someone comes and tells you to give 10% of your income for 'protection' or "else"! This is a difficult reality here. All of this aside, the grace of the mission is to be found in the people. There is a lot of joy; faith is central to so many lives here. We come back to those deeply reflected words of St John's Gospel for the celebration of Christmas and the birth of our Lord and Saviour, '*The Word became flesh. He dwelt among us*'. This is what we celebrate - God coming among us and remaining with us, through His death and resurrection, in the power of the Holy Spirit! From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. As a priest the grace can be found in being *present* to people. Jesus is here, in all of those around us and, in a particularly intimate way, He is discovered in those who are suffering. He is amongst the poor; He is dwelling there. Priestly presence is extremely important and it is a concept I had not reflected on much before. Just *being* there and turning up and showing your face is really key - the '*ministry of presence*'. There are fourteen communities within the parish, nine of which have their own church or small chapel. Mass is also celebrated in parks, houses and condominium social spaces, including a sports arena! There is a strong sense of the importance of keeping small communities together. Some of these communities may only have one Sunday Mass each month. Each community has its '*responsable*' or '*coordinador*' and each has its own catechists. Catechesis is a major part of the mission in the parishes, something that has been well reflected upon in previous newsletters. But, there's something about just being '*present*'.

Since my first few weeks in Ate, I have also had the privilege of visiting Fr. Melchor in Nuevo Progreso, within the diocese of Huánuco and visiting Fr. Michael in Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Carabayllo. I am currently writing this from Carabayllo. I thank my brother priests for their support. In a couple of weeks I will head to Cochabamba, Bolivia for a six-week language course. "*Poco a poco*" (bit by bit) as we say.

I wish all of you a peaceful and grace-filled Christmas. May the Word made Flesh bring you joy and may you always be deeply aware of how much grace upon grace is being poured out upon you. Thank you for your prayerful support of the Society. Be assured of my prayers and, in advance, every good wish for the New Year too!

~ Fr. Matthew Anscombe

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

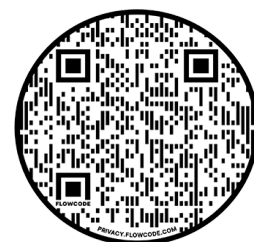
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