



# MISSIONARY SISTERS OF ST PETER CLAVER

## Priests of Kibera Slum



Priests live in one of the poorest suburbs in the world, the Kibera slum, in the Kenyan capital Nairobi where Fr. Bonaventure Luchidio, PMS director for Kenya, visited last September. This is his story from Fides:

I arrived in the parish of Christ the King and received a warm welcome from Fr. Jose Martinez of the Mexican among the people whom they served the parishes on the margin of the slum. This feeling of being considered strangers Society of Our Lady of Guadalupe for Foreign Missions, founded in Mexico.

One of the priests, Fr. Jose says: Initially Kibera was part of the parishes of Our Lady of Guadalupe, of Adam's Arcade, and the parish of St. Michael's Otiende which are located on the margin of the slum. Each parish used to take care of half of the slum area and the priests visited it for pastoral care, visits to the sick, celebration of the Sacraments in small Christian communities, and then in the evening they returned to their parish'. This service was not the best from a pastoral point of view because the priests, although well received in the slum villages, were treated as visitors who come and go from their comforts in the parishes on the margin of the slum. This feeling of being considered strangers among the people whom they served challenged the priests to act, and to live closer to the people, sharing their plight. The first priest rented a shack and lived in the heart of the slums of Kibera.

Being with the flock and grazing them from the inside bore much fruit, because the priests were being accepted and embraced by the community of both Catholics and non-Catholics. They were able to learn the language of the slum and to reach the hearts of its dwellers.

Coming to terms with the reality of life in the slums: the challenges of housing, the difficulties of water and sanitation, the risk of crime and addiction, had opened the priests to God, allowing Him to challenge them among the urban poor.

This year of Covid-19, churches were closed, and people were unable to attend Mass. Many of the slum dwellers lost their livelihood so they could not afford one meal a day. The parish on the margin instituted a 'Vase of Love' where offerings could be placed for the needy.

The people of the slums, in their poverty are extremely generous and the culture of sharing is deeply rooted in them', says Fr. Jose. 'Most of them arrived in Nairobi with nothing and they found themselves in Kibera because it is cheap, but without money or a source of income people suffer from neglect and abuse. Then a good Samaritan comes along and offers a person in need a shoulder to lean on.

When this person finds a source of livelihood he goes into debt to assist those in difficulty, and this is their source of generosity'. Fr. Jose takes me back to the main agenda of the day: People will be praying the missionary rosary, visiting the poor, the sick and the vulnerable. Then Fr. Jose Martinez says, 'Fr. Luchidio, how beautiful it would be if you came to celebrate Mass for us for World Mission Sunday'. I was shocked but who can say no to such an invitation? We had agreed with the Cardinal to celebrate Holy Mass in the Basilica, but my missionary heart is in Kibera.