

FROM THE ARCHIVES

This year we celebrate 50 years of the presence of Redemptorists in the city of Fortaleza in Northern Brazil. Below is an edited extra from a letter from Fr Michael Condon, C.Ss.R., written in 1964, which provides a picture of the situation in the parish at the time.

Little more than a year has passed since the parish of Sao Raimundo was handed over to the Irish Redemptorists.

Within this new parish live no less than ten thousand children who need education, and for all those children there are but two so-called schools with a maximum capacity of two hundred. Because of this great need, one of the first problems we faced was the building of a great, big school with a capacity of one thousand. This is where Sao Raimundo shows signs of development, for after the great difficulty of getting the site for the building from the city manager, and the greater difficulty of scraping money together from every angle, the part of the school planned for this year is well on its way. We have made a start at least, and hope to continue to the end. In March of next year we hope to open six classrooms.

Our parish is a very privileged one, if we go by the number of hospitals. We have three. But the difficulty, as with many new buildings in Brazil, is that two of these hospitals have never functioned. The third has room only for a very limited number, and to date I can truly say that any patient I tried to get admitted has died before admittance day came. In our parish you can see death at work in ten different forms - be it cancer or T.B. or poisoning or the lack of treatment. We cannot hope to help the incurables but for those who have curable illness, we hope to start some medical posts in the near future.

The greatest enemy facing the church in Brazil is the dearth of priests, as is being proved by the change that has come over the people and the parish of Sao Raimundo within the last year. Before our arrival, only one priest was in attendance. He came on Saturdays to hear confessions and celebrated one Mass on Sundays. Now, the church has become a parish and instead of one priest there are five, and instead of one Sunday Mass there are ten, and instead of five hundred people going to Sunday Mass there are from seven to ten thousand. All this goes to show what the presence of more priests can do for religion in Brazil. In the church, we have already started the Perpetual Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and thousands of people crowd the church every Wednesday to attend. It is estimated that from three to five thousand walked in the torch-lit procession in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour on her feast.

As for confessions and communions the climax came in the three days around the feast of All Souls on November second. People just thronged to the church, for the Brazilians have a great devotion to the holy souls. For three days five Fathers heard confessions and still when the feast day arrived they were not finished. Thousands of people confessed and thousands received communion.

These are just a few lines to show that there is hope for the future. Though thousands came to church, we mustn't forget that thousands stayed away. But these can be won back also, if we have the help of your prayers and sacrifices, and if we can count on an ever-increasing number of priests.