

OUR LINK WITH BAMENDA

Just after Christmas, I went on a fantastic plane: a Boeing Dreamliner, a 787, brand-new. It had lots of features, environmentally friendly, a smooth ride and big windows you could dim at the press of a button. It was a long flight, 7 hours across the Mediterranean, Algeria and then the Sahara Desert, and it was really hot and humid when we got out. I was on my way to Africa, to Cameroon, to Bamenda up in the cool hills North West, in order to visit Archbishop Cornelius. That's where these fine priests come from, who work in our Diocese: Fr. Bonaventure (in Bournemouth), Fr. George (in New Forest) and Fr. Thom (in Bordon). I must say, you'd love Cameroon. When you drive up from the coast to Bamenda, it's full of woodlands and trees, with lots of farms growing cocoa, rubber and bananas. The Archbishop has a Jeep and we went on some trips. Everywhere you go in towns and villages, there's always a big Catholic church, a Catholic school, maybe even a Catholic hospital too. One day we visited St. Joseph's Rehabilitation Centre that helps children who are disabled or injured. They make artificial limbs and aids. But there in the Eye Clinic serving the blind and visually impaired was a big sign thanking the people of the Diocese of Portsmouth for the new equipment. I felt so proud!

Jesus said: *In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do.* He then went on to give us the model prayer *The Our Father*. When I was at school, I was taught that there are four types of prayer: ACTS, A-C-T-S, standing for Adoration, Contrition (sorrow for sins), Thanksgiving and Supplication (i.e. petitions), ACTS. You'll find all these four types of prayer in the *Our Father*: Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication. So I suggest that when you say your prayers before going to bed, think ACTS, A-C-T-S. Begin by *adoring* God for His love this day. Examine your conscience and make an *Act of Contrition* for the sins you've committed. *Thank* Him for all the good things He has given you. And *petition* Him for all your needs, for your family and friends, for the Church and for the world. A-C-T-S - Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication - it's all summed up in the *Our Father*.

I nearly forgot to tell you why I went to visit Archbishop Cornelius. That's because for over 40 years our Diocese of Portsmouth has been twinned with Bamenda in a very special link. We try to help each other out. We've not only had priests from here helping over there and priests from there helping over here: our parishes and our schools have raised over £1M for different projects in Bamenda in parishes and schools, health-care and social welfare. In fact, 4 years ago, 30 people from here, including some students from our schools, went over to visit Bamenda, and later that summer, a group of 30 priests and people came to stay with us in return. That's why it's great to have with us today our Bamenda priests. We say goodbye to Fr. Thom who returns home this summer! We welcome 2 new priests coming.

So thank you for listening. In this Mass let us pray for the clergy and people of Bamenda, its parishes and schools. There's been some social unrest there in recent times, so let's ask God to pour out His Holy Spirit of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, let us ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, patron of our Youth, and St. Aloysius, on this his feast-day, that God will pour out many blessings on the people of Cameroon, and upon ourselves.