

## Contemplation to Attain Love

---

*"In the deep and mysterious Amazon, a story is always waiting to be told. No-one can forget the sight of her waters adorned by Victoria-Regis. These lush and bewitching plants, found in bayous or lakes, at night become dark mirrors, pooling the light of the vain and seductive moon. Here, the moon is called Laci, and for local maidens she is their muse and inspiration for love.*

*In the hilltops, and on the highest summits, they yearn for the appearance of Laci. She is believed to carry romance in her wake. Her kisses are transmuted into the scatter of dazzling stars.*



*Once upon a time, there was a beautiful girl so overcome by her devotion to the moon, that she wished to ascend to the heavens, and be turned into a star. She decided to wander the highest peaks and mountains, until her dream could be magically realized. Each moonlit night, as the stars of the sky appeared and began to serenade the earth, the*

*beautiful girl attempted to touch the moon as it bathed in a lake; but each time she did so, the moonlit waters mysteriously fractured and slipped away from her grasp. Laci the Moon, looked down and took pity on this girl, who was blessed with such loveliness. She decided that, since she was unable to give the girl the celestial kingdom that she desired, she would immortalize her on earth, turning her into a water lily, called the Victoria Regis - a star as beautiful as any in the sky, with a perfume unparalleled by any other flower. But Laci's greatest gift to the girl comes after the flowering. The broad leaf, which stretches out like an open palm, forms the perfect receptacle for water. At night, in the moonlight, the moonlit waters - so lovingly remembered by her - can at last be held.*

*Today the Victoria-Regia exists with the same luminosity that she received on that moonlit night, when Laci, Queen of the night, immortalized her, with a kiss of a light that, although out of her reach, had the power to transform her into a water star."*

I wanted to begin today's entry by sharing with you this Amazonian legend from Brazil, as written by author Anisio Mello. I invite you to use your imagination to transport yourself into this Amazonian world, so full of inspiration for poets, writers, anthropologists, biologists, and missionaries. It is impossible to live here without becoming affected by a place which combines so much beauty with so much nature. You can't help but thank God for his magnificent creation.

In these last few days, while travelling by boat on my way to an indigenous community, I have been contemplating the river and the flora, recording and imagining many of the lively tales that exist today in this corner of the Amazon. Every ethnic group has a collection of their own stories to tell. Some are of pleasure, some of pain; all of them are firmly rooted

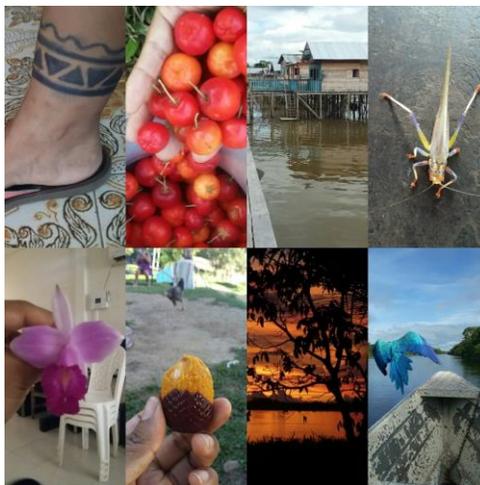
## Contemplation to Attain Love

---

in this little part of the planet, and many of the people who tell them cannot conceive of any world beyond their own.

Now, as a pilgrim to this Amazonian world, I am going to leave my own short history in these parts. It is Mother Nature who will really know what I have felt here, what I have thought and how I have lived out of the depths of my being; for she has accompanied me in all my moments of light and shadow. In her I have come to recognize myself as a fragile being, spent of all knowledge, ignorant, poor and alone. Thanks to these feelings, I have seen that it was necessary to live this experience in order to strip myself bare, to open myself to new insights, discover the wisdom that is embedded in Mother Nature, and in these simple people who I have grown to understand through each contact, conversation, silence and glance. I give thanks to this beautiful earth, and to her people as well, for showing me the gifts and graces bestowed by God; for allowing me to offer His services, to be His hands, His smile, His ears and His happiness in this little slice of heaven.

I can now say that I am closer to living the Ignatian Spiritual Exercise, known as Meditation for Reaching Love. I feel myself so small in front of something so marvellous, seeing the splendour of His Creation, recognizing that He bestowed such a beautiful part of Himself as a demonstration of His great love for us. In these moments, everything speaks to me of His presence and His immense Love for us all.



With a sense of the blessings received, as Ignatio puts it, and with my heart full of gratitude for everything that I have experienced during my time here, I broach the question “how can I best continue to serve this mission from the realities of city life? How can I continue caring for Mother Nature? How can I tend this beautiful Home that our Mother Father God has put into our hands, just like the maiden who came to admire the moon so much that she wished to become one with the night sky?” In this way, I share the feelings of many other people who, having come to the Amazon, have come to love her and connect with her, wishing to stay joined to her beauty by caring for her - not just her flora and fauna, but the men and women that people her small villages and who ask for our support and care, just as Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si*.

Many answers come to me, some simple, and others more radical. Between these various revelations I come back to the one important consideration. We must have more contact with Mother Nature from wherever we are in the world, leaving the city to contemplate the countryside and allowing ourselves to embrace her beauty, because I feel that, only then, will we be able to save her. I want our families to take more excursions and hikes, taking them into contact with this natural world gifted to us by God. In order to care and love more fully, I want to be allowed to cover myself in dirt, splash through the water, and commune deeply with people.

## Contemplation to Attain Love

---

Moreover, in order to know, value and love the different sorts of people who share our Common Home, we must learn to value the simple, more austere life-styles - people who take only what is necessary from the earth - people who rely on God to manifest himself day by day, trusting that with his help, as they enter the fields to plough, irrigate and sow, there will be a germination of the seed deep in the soil, and that although invisible at first, that seed will spring forth, taking the right shape and colour, and will grow accordingly. The patience and perseverance of such people ensures that the plant is fed with the right nutrients, at the right quantities, and that pests are controlled. Then, when the flower comes, it is duly admired, and the fruit is gratefully received. All this is done at a certain pace, over months or years, and it is a system that runs on trust. This is the same trust that God has placed in us. He trusts that the covenant we have with Him will not be broken, that it will be activated in time to halt the destruction of our Common Home. His trust in us flowers each time we show indignation at the way our brothers in Amazonian villages suffer at the hands of the greedy few, when we anger at their displacement from their homes and livelihood. Their struggle is not just for their own land, it is for the whole planet. They know that if Mother Earth is depleted and destroyed, it will bring an end, not just to them, but to all of us - we would all die together. For this reason, the call to support and work for these people is very important. From wherever we are, we must we go on defending their right to their little piece of earth, and never turn our gaze away from them.



Now it is time for me to leave this Amazon and take all that I have learned back to my old life in the city; to my family, my friends and my work. I return with this suitcase full of insights, some of which will not be apparent until I get back. Little by little, I go on distilling the personal significance of this experience, not all of which I can put into words. It is time to thank CVX Worldwide for the opportunity they have given me to live as a volunteer, an opportunity I hope will open a window for others to share this experience. Personally, I believe that God calls us with great urgency, and, if we listen, he will make our efforts worthwhile.

Thanks to this Amazonian life, I have learned how little I need to be happy, that happiness does not exist within things and commodities, but within one's harmonious relationships, with family, friends, with nature itself, with plants, animals, insects etc. So, setting off home with this affirmation at heart, I will ask myself each day, how am I tending to my relationship with the Common Home? Each time I go to the supermarket or shop, and I become dazzled by some new consumer item, I will ask myself, do I truly need it? And if I don't need it then I won't buy it, because like it or not, my purchase will only contribute to the consumerism that generates rubbish and degrades our environment. I will ask God to give me the power to be honest with myself, to enable my life to be more austere, to tune into my trust and faith in Him. I believe that, by only purchasing according to our basic

## Contemplation to Attain Love

---

needs, we can put aside many of the things that distract us from simplicity, and the small details where God is found.

My mother taught me as a child to show gratitude with the phrase "May God repay you". My heart is full of that wish now. I wish to say that to everyone I had the fortune to share my year in the Amazon with: my pastoral group (Magnolia, Sister Nohelia, Friar Rodolfo, Friar Manuel), the Jesuit community (Alfredo, Pablo and Valerio), the Marist community (Vero, Iñigo, Peggy, Justin, Brother Zeferino, Brother Verno, Betty), my companions during these months Father Miguel (Javeriano priest), Marta Barral (Javeriano voluntary), Maria, Tatiana and Edenia, the Conega nuns, my dear friends Marita and Fernando Lopez SJ, and to many other names and faces that filled my heart and which are now part of the list of names that, as Pedro Casaldaliga said: "At the end of the road they would ask me : have you lived? have you loved? and I, without saying anything, will open my heart full of those names." I'm taking with me an imprint of the face of each person that I had the fortune to share time with, even briefly, and I would like to sing to them like Luis Guitarra "while there is a horizon on this Earth, while you have not lost your will to laugh, while a star shines in the sky, don't give up, don't get tired of living, everything will be all right...while there is someone denouncing the injuries, the injustices, the unfulfilled promises..."

Thanks to each and every one of you, for following my experiences by reading these short accounts, month after month, thank you for your prayers and shows of affection. I am still in God's hands now. He will lead me to new paths to continue my pilgrimage, new bridges to cross and new bridges to build. Warm wishes and hugs to you all,

Lore