

## LEARNING

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It would seem, that I have forgotten to write my monthly sharing of the pilgrimage through these lands where God is manifested in a special and gentle way. And although they have tactfully respected this time of silence, it is probably just a sign that I am progressively adapting better to this corner of the Amazon.

I feel that it is so, and the insects recognize me more and sting less, the itching becomes more tolerable. The heat is more bearable, but with that I do not mean that I perspire less, only that I have learned to experience it more naturally and, of course, in this adaptation the fans and air conditioning play a part as well. The scenic views and people's faces are now becoming more familiar to me. Now I can better



understand the conversations because, although we speak the same language, each country and region has its own words that are not always easy to understand either because I use them very little or because I do not understand their meaning in context.

After that short introduction, I would now like to tell you that this October, I returned to sail the Amazon River to visit the final communities (Zaragoza, Libertad and Puerto Triunfo) and thus complete the first tour of the 10 riverine communities that aims to be a study to better understand the current pastoral situation, what the needs

are and to be able to draw up, together with the pastoral team and the community, a pastoral plan that enables them to keep alive the flame of the faith and their way of relating to God from the a catholic point of view without having to compromise their cultural essence, their rites and their traditions. It sounds very ambitious I know, but dreaming costs nothing.

These communities are further afield from Leticia. It takes about 4 to 5 hours in a community boat that usually has a small engine and therefore is slow. Although the trip is usually quite tiring, the advantage of traveling in these boats is that during the journey I can talk to the people from the community about their daily lives, which gives me many inspirations for my study. Moreover, it allows me to have a more direct relationship with them and then, in the community, I feel closer and better known as we recall the days we stayed with them.

In this corner of the world, the effect of climate change is clearly there to see - they have had little rainfall. It makes it difficult in terms of nourishment and use of water to cool down in the heat, because they can only use rain water for cooking. The water of the Amazon River is not suitable for human consumption because it is contaminated and causes digestive problems and skin rashes.

In these communities, being that much further from Leticia, there are other churches such as Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Baptists, etc. To that extent, I do not see a problem since I believe that what is important is that people should be able to relate

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to God, be happy and relate to others in harmony. Unfortunately, this is not the case, because, as is often the case, adherents of one church feel they must discredit the other. In their eyes it is the Catholic Church that is the culprit because they assume it is a church where people can get drunk causing fights that end in serious problems or even the death of a member of the community. And all this of course is dividing the communities and some of those who previously worked together within the *mingas* (NB type of traditional communal work) now no longer attend and that clearly hinders the development of the community and creates an individualism among its members that worries the Council of the community. I do not believe that the other churches mean for it to be so; surely, they do not mean to cause division.

That makes me think how important is interreligious dialogue. I believe that with a small degree of dialogue among the pastors, maybe agreeing on a minimum set of principles of coexistence, without believing that it is a competition for who is better or has more parishioners, would help to improve the good of the community, trying to live as children of the same Father / Mother God, though with different ways of seeing faith and practices.

From this small experience and reading the Beatitudes of Adolfo Chercoles, the following phrase resonates with me:



*The problem of my brotherhood, if I really am the brother of all men, is not how I feel in my heart, but the real problem is that others can feel themselves as my brothers when they come across of me. This is where fraternity comes into play: what does it matter to the other that I in my "little heart" feel like brother, if he sees me as a hedgehog?*

How true, the problem is that often we focus on ourselves and what we do is not always with purity of intention, as Ignatius says, it is not from generosity, but probably, quite unconsciously, we seek that sense of personal well-being that prevents us from coming out of ourselves to meet the other, and let him be the one who truly feels a brother or sister.

It is in this feeling and reflection that I fix my eyes on Jesus so that I do not forget any of the words that touch my heart. In the midst of my fragility I can feel Jesus: looking, speaking, listening, loving like Him, so that others perceive Jesus in me, even though sometimes I see myself like a hedgehog.

This time is a school for learning, not only through the contact with people in the communities but also while sharing with my fellow travellers, these people (volunteers, religious, laity) who share my day to day, whom I meet for dinner or coffee and under that pretext to have long chats after work talking about our experiences of God, our joys, our fears and our dreams. In the end the heart stays warm because we have been all our own selves and we feel accepted and welcomed by the other as we are.

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And in this new understanding by those same impulses with which I act and in which I discover that it is God who drives me to continue dreaming and doing things that I like. I enrolled this month for a basic Portuguese course at the Federal University of Amazonas. Thanks to this minor act of folly to learn a new language, I have been able to meet new people with different activities and interests, entering another circle of friends from which I derive a lot of good. So, the next sharing will probably be in Portuguese.

Lastly, I want to share with you Fernando López SJ's words during my last session of spiritual direction with regard to me not always finding it easy to integrate with the communities: " when we work with communities we have three traffic lights: the first is the community's: it takes its time and only when they feel you are trustworthy arrives the moment for them to set their traffic lights to green at which point you can perform



and share their rites or spaces. The second is the traffic light inside me: when it is at red I should not force it either, but wait until in my time and progress I can also turn it to green to be able to share with the communities. The third is the traffic light of my relationship with God that also turns green when He tells me that it is time, but, if it is showing yellow he is telling me that we still have to wait." He also told me that "generally this process is going on gradually at all three traffic lights and it often happens that the process is very similar in all three, so that when one is in green the others are too." In conclusion, he invited me to be

aware of these three processes that I am living and that I open myself to the experiences that God is giving me without forcing my pace, but at the same time without letting me stagnate, and that it is not just my will but the union of the three wills.

That is my fourth month. A fraternal embrace to all those who accompany me by reading this modest sharing.