



Ladies separating peanuts after harvest

Dear Friends,

First of all, thank you for all the messages and prayer offered for the Mission and for the Country of Ethiopia in this difficult and complicated time of her history. Life in Ethiopia has never been easy, because of the different ideologies which have been in power throughout the decades, but also because of the geographical and climate factors, diverse and so extreme in their ranges. We have the desert heat of Afar, Gambella and Gode, in contrast with the mildness of Awassa, and the chilly mornings and nights of Addis Abeba. The droughts which have plagued different areas of the country, (Gode did not have the six-monthly rain we were expecting in October), aggravate sicknesses (even before we consider Covid), and food insecurity. To this mix, the events of the past year in the north make for more suffering among the poor and marginalised. Which ever side of the ideological divide one is on it is the poor who suffer and who have an almost impossible situation made worse.

Unfortunately, so much of the news and views expressed seem to simplify what is an extremely complicated and intricate matter. Listening to international news stations, I have been struck by the sweeping nature of statements which do not encompass the reality of the history and life of this nation made up as it is, of a rich ethnic diversity each with their individual histories. I have spoken to missionaries who have lived here for forty or more years in an effort to understand what is happening, and realise that the pain and suffering which manifests in violence has roots beyond political and territorial arguments.

Thus, violence which may erupt in different places of this wonderful country cannot dictate whether I go or stay.... The poor always remain, their fear and insecurity remain, their suffering remains, the choice of the 'least of my brothers' by the Risen Lord, to be found in them remains and since it seems that the Lord has sent me to the poor of *this* place, I see no reason to go anywhere else.

This region has long been a 'no go' area as far as foreign Embassy counsels was concerned, and so, in fact, nothing has changed. That said, be sure we do nothing to attract trouble, and I firmly believe something that Mother Teresa used to say to the sisters, "if you stay close to the poor God will take care of you." So this remains my intention: to make the Charity of Christ present to a people "who do not know [him], and thus do not want [him]." (Jesus to Mother Teresa, "Founding Grace").

So now to give you news of the mission!

This month wraps up the first year since the mission was reopened; it has been a 'marathon' of work, impossible situations which the Lord has sorted out 'just in time' on each occasion. At the moment we care for 24 children, two teenagers together with eleven mothers. We have a staff of five men who attend to the gate and to the small banana, and papaya plantation that



The sad remains of the first bananas after the invasion of hedgehogs!

we have begun. This means that from Monday to Friday there are 40 people who have breakfast and lunch in our house! Three of our married women are pregnant and should deliver their babies in the next three to four months.

Since we have no way of knowing whether the ladies have had covid or not, I surmise that the 'bad' coughs and colds we have all been having almost by rotation have been the appearance of the dreaded virus in our midst. Fr Angelo has brought

me testing kits so that I will be able to check the women from time to time when I notice symptoms

The work of cleaning the house and compound continues and we begin to see daylight at the end of the tunnel! Since I am alone for the work with the ladies and children, I rely ever more on the ladies themselves to help out, and I have realised that they need a lot of help to see their children as persons, and respect them as such. Of course, with the tension and surrounding difficulties they live with, it is not easy for them to have the patience and presence of mind to use everyday life as a blackboard on which to teach their children. That said, the women are fiercely protective of their children and their needs and have been known to resort to violence to drive this fact home! In so many ways we are just at the beginning of this 'work' with the ladies and their children.

Down on the stretch of land along the river, we now have about 550 banana plants and about twenty pawpaw plants, which we shall try to increase in the next few weeks seeing as we have cleaned the land a little further.

The gardeners came to find me in my classroom one day with distraught expressions... giant hedgehogs had started eating the first bunches of bananas that we had been eagerly awaiting to ripen. We think that now we have blocked all the ways by which the spiny intruders may have entered our land.... But time will tell! Our watermelons which were growing stealthily under the banana trees have been found by the local monkey population and they have 'noted' the time the gardeners leave for lunch, at which point they descend to the feast! Once a larger monkey was spotted by Abdella, (one of the gardeners), who ran up thinking he would frighten it away! No such luck the monkey and Abdella had a 'face to face confrontation, until with the aid of banging on a big tin he frightened it off. We are a little worried what we shall do when the bananas start to ripen, because once the whole clan of monkeys descend there will be nothing left to eat!



'Hedgehog attack!'



Tamara handiwork

The ladies have started hand weaving shawls, and although they have only started to learn the craft they are doing quite well. At the moment we are working on quality but as soon as they get to a certain level, we shall start to sell them locally.

We pray for each of our friends and benefactors with thanksgiving for your generosity and concern for this tiny mission in the midst of the Church.

Keep us in your prayer. God bless you, Sr Mary Joachim