



Dereje, sr Joachim, Ethiopia, Abdella, Abp Antoine Camellieri (nuncio) Tesamma, Bethlehem, Jesus
Visit of Nuncio 21st 22nd October Gode, Ethiopia

Dear Friends of the Mission,(letter written for Fides magazine:Vatican Missionary paper)

We have just had a wonderful experience of the care and concern of the Church, through the short visit of the Nuncio present here in Ethiopia. We live on the 'frontiers of the Gospel' in Gode, a place where the vast majority of the population are Muslim; there is a small presence of Orthodox and Evangelical communities, and a tiny presence of the Church in our mission of seven missionary Catholics, three of whom are volunteers.

Normally the Prefect of the local Church visits us every two weeks to celebrate Holy Mass and help us in our mission of making Christ present both through our work with vulnerable women and their children, and the work of transforming our desert through growing fruit and vegetables to make us more self-sustaining. For various reasons, Fr Angelo, had to be absent, a priest who had kindly offered to come for a few days had a death in the family, and without any replacement we ended up having no Mass for more than a month, and the Eucharist which was reserved in our tabernacle could only be broken into so many pieces.....

The nuncio's visit was a joy for all of us and coincided with the rain which we had hoped would fall since, mid October, we were well into the rainy season and had had very little till this point in time. So we received both natural rain and supernatural grace at the same time: Holy Mass, homilies on the Word of God, and the possibility of confession....we enjoyed to hear from the nuncio of the life of the Church in different places, to be refreshed with the news of the latest Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father on St Therese of Lisieux. Although the visit was only two days, the visit of the nuncio, broke our sense of isolation and helped us to feel part of the Universal Church again. We are grateful



that the nuncio braved the plague of grasshoppers who arrived in the wake of the rains, and though his visit was short we are so very grateful.

Once the nuncio had left, we returned to some of the practical challenges that were brought on by the welcomed rainfall. It is usual that when rain falls heavily, as it did for a few days, the local electricity from the town cuts out, and whilst we have a generator, the high cost of petrol means that we have to be careful, and anyway it can't substitute all our electrical needs, one of which is to be able to pump water for our needs and to be able to pump 20,000 litres of water a day for our neighbours in the prison!

Of course, in a place like Gode, electricians are few and far between, and so the simple task of calling an electrician to fix the problems caused by the electrical 'outage' was a challenge in itself; finding out what the exact problem was, another ... and then discovering the way to fix it yet another! Every missionary knows that the functioning or malfunctioning of the structures of the mission can be so challenging and downright depressing as you see all the resources of the mission being absorbed in repairs and unforeseen costs, that it is easy to lose sight of the mission itself, and so the visit of the nuncio was a great help in keeping our minds and hearts fixed on the mission which, as Pope Francis reminded us in his Mission Sunday Message, "the Lord is greater than all our problems, above all if

we encounter them in our mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. For in the end, **this mission is his...**" This was also brought home to us by the response to our litany of lamentations to our Prefect, Fr Angelo, the simple sentence, "Jesus is risen!"

Truly Risen! In the next few days, during the ongoing repairs, the Lord brought what seemed like a deluge of need to our gates! People in immediate desperate need of help, whom we were able to attend to. One of whom was a mother of new-born twins, whom we were taken to see in a forlorn little hut on the outskirts of the town where the rubbish is thrown. Her five other children had not eaten that day, when we arrived at four o'clock in the afternoon. We were able to share with two families food we had in our house, and then take the mother and her husband, with the new-born boys to the hospital.

Each time I take poor people to the hospital, I am struck by the complexity they are confronted with, for not only are they sick, and maybe cannot speak the language of the attending doctor, but they have very little idea of how their bodies function, and of what could be wrong with them. They resemble 'lambs led to slaughter', pushed and pulled from one examination to another, never questioning or even understanding what is going on, receiving pieces of



paper that they cannot read, for medicine they cannot afford, never mind understand how to take. Our presence helps them mediate the process, ask questions they cannot, and help them cooperate with the healing process.

So, after the nuncio's departure we went to the hospital with the mother and father of the twins, whilst two of us cared for the twins, one went to obtain blood, another navigating the procedures with the parents, till late in the evening. At the same time a nurse called about another patient, who had arrived from a rural area needing a caesarean the next day, but who had no family to help with medicine and food, the Lord seemed to move us from one imperative need to another, reminding us that it is truly His mission... we have only to follow!

We have the joy of having Jesus, a Spanish volunteer who is a physiotherapist; he radiates the presence of the Church in the hospital where his 'hands on' contact with the sick who come to him for help from their homes, as well as the in-patients in the hospital is a growing experience of our mission to be channels of God's goodness in our actions beyond words. Joining him we have two Ethiopian graduates (Dereje and Ethiopia) who have decided to volunteer for a time, who along with Tesamma and Abdella (who both run the agricultural part) Bethlehem and myself form the Missionary team of Gode.

Whilst we are aware of the great privilege to be part of the mission of first evangelization entrusted to us by the Lord, His presence in the Church, made tangible for us through our shepherds, strengthens and encourages us not only to continue, but to 'go further'!

Happy Missionaries with the twins

