

God's Timing

Before I share with you the experiences of my first month on the Pan Amazonian project, I want to briefly relate the sequence of events that brought me to this three-bordered country so far from my own country and from the city where I was born.



Some years back, while working in the Provincial Curate of the Jesuit Mission in Ecuador, I read about a Community Itinerant Project that was being carried out by a Spanish Jesuit by the name of Fernando López. This information alerted me to the possibility of a joint mission where lay-workers and Jesuit could work together in places where few might venture, but where there is great need. I have always considered indigenous communities in the Amazon to be villages steeped in history with an ecological, environmentally-sensitive culture. I have always dreamed of getting to know these communities better, including those non-contact villages which have not wanted any association with what we like to call civilisation. But, of course, this path would not be easy and it would require a certain amount of sacrifice, so despite the strength of the feeling, I found I preferred to turn a deaf ear to the calling and let the emotions pass.

Until one day, exactly one year later, I found myself, due to a change in personal circumstances, without a job, without a place to live and with no financial security. It was just at this time, while on one of my annual Spiritual Retreats, that, after hearing more about the Pan Amazonian Project, and, again, about the work of Mario López, who was a member of my local CVX, I felt a renewed desire to follow this calling. My companion at this retreat, P. Jorge Cela SJ, encouraged me to start making some enquiries and he told me to let God's Will act through me. He put me in touch with Mau and later with Alfredo Ferro SJ, coordinator of the Pan Amazonian Project. Emails flew back and forth between us until Alfredo suggested that I go to get to know Leticia, the capital city of the Colombian Amazonian Department, where the Community Project was situated, and where I could meet the members of the project community and staff. This experience would give me the light and the tools to discern whether or not to go ahead with the volunteer work. I must thank the community there for their kind words to help me decide my course: "The fact that you have come here does not force you to volunteer. You must feel free to decide." These words were the key to me making my final decision.

I have always shared with my family my wish to be a volunteer. Right from the beginning, my father, my siblings, my nieces and my sisters-in-law have all given me their support, even if they couldn't fully understand the depth of my desire. Not that I myself could understand it clearly - the spirit acting in me was like a flame that burnt from within and could not be hidden - perhaps it was a way to give something back in return for all the goodness that I have received over the years as a member of CVX. I give thanks for the blessing of my family who are always supporting me.

The following month, at the end of May, Alfredo, Mauricio and I met up in Quito. This meeting was to mark the moment when I would sign up for a year of volunteering. Once all the red tape of visas and paperwork was cleared I could then set off on my journey to Leticia. Along with the little money I carried with me, I brought along the

single-minded faith that I was going with God. I discovered that no time is better than God's time, when events start to coalesce and everything flows. You have nothing more to say than "your will be done."



So, having shared with you the sequence of events that got me here, I would like to share with you how Ignatian spirituality has permeated my first four weeks on the Pan-Amazonian mission so far. I would like to say that never before have I experienced with such clarity the "conquer thy Self" philosophy of which Ignacio speaks at the beginning of each Spiritual Retreat. I have had to conquer my Self each time I felt the heat start to get the better of me, and each time the itch of a mosquito bite

stopped me from sleeping. I have overcome the fear of the bats which live in my cabin and I have overcome the negative self-talk which tells me I am more city-folk than I had imagined. In the midst of all these small tests I have continued to find our Lord Jesus in the beauty of God's Creation.

I have felt it each day when I am awoken by a chorus of birdsong. Never before have I heard so many birds sing together, and I still hope to one day be able to distinguish each unique bird and song. Along with these beautiful awakenings there are breathtaking sunsets. The evening sky fills with such different shades of colour that it resembles a fire in the sky and, as the sun gently descends, this light blends with the river and the vegetation, making everything of one same light. It is truly beautiful.



I have felt it when I enjoy the faces of people in Leticia and in the two communities that I have so far visited: Nazareth and Arara. Each face reflects a light and shadow, each carries a dream. They all have a unique way of looking after this earth and being at one with nature. They know intuitively if a cloud means rain, or if it will soon pass over and be tossed away by the wind, like the leaves that flutter in the trees.

I have felt it in the times of silence when I listen, watch, and contemplate - letting everything I see and feel around me touch my heart. Like a sponge, I hope to absorb as much as I can from these people, approaching them with a simple look or a smile to let them know who I am and what I am doing here.

In some cases I receive a warm smile from them in return, other times a long silence. Eventually they present a question to me and little by little the ice breaks as a relationship starts to form and we share the stories of our life. These stories are sometimes ones of gratitude. Sometimes they are stories of pain. In both cases we can find God.

I give thanks to our Lord that on these visits I am accompanied by a native tikuna pastoralist whose name is Magnolia, and by a nun who is called Sister Noelia. These women and I prepare meals together, clear up after dinner, meet for planning or evaluation sessions and at the same time find time to share our stories together, our goals, our hopes and our fears.

This mission complements my participation in a course covering the Socio-political Movements of CVX. The documents that I read in that course motivated me to try my hardest to live in the best possible way as a Christian. One phrase that stuck with me was: *“an authentic faith never is comfortable nor individualistic. It always implies a profound desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave something better from our short time spent on this earth.”*
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I ask for your prayers so that I may continue on this path, opening my heart to the people as they let me enter their lives. Let me nourish them as they nourish me, so that I may keep giving the best of my voluntary service.

Much love,

Lore