

Quiet time

"Walk through the Amazon and listen to what the people are saying. Take part in the everyday life of the people. Observe and take note of everything carefully. Do not worry about the results, the Spirit will show the way. Courage! Begin where you can." - Claudio Perani, sj

As soon as I got to the Amazon this was one of the first quotes that, when I read it, caught my attention. Now three months on, I started to realise that I can understand it more from the heart. For God is working in me, as Ignatius says in his autobiography: "as a teacher teaches a pupil," slowly, quietly, at the pace of the canoe.



This month has been a tranquil time and by that I do not mean internally where waves continue to be made all the time. I mean it's been a time to stay for a longer time in the city of Leticia, to share more closely with people who are dedicated to pastoral work, working from different trenches, dreaming of building a better world. People who, both in their own personal and professional vocation, are shocked by the conditions that exist in this environment. They commit to dedicate their strength to try to contribute something to get rid of the problems that arise on the

margins of life, conditions that can only be observed by those who live in these places on the frontiers of society.

I visited the other two frontiers: Tabatinga in Brazil and Santa Rosa in Peru. In Tabatinga I met two regular Canons religious nuns that have been living there for about 5 months. I enjoyed sharing with them my time of mission here, especially in the light and shadows that I have been discovering in myself and in the mission environment. Every time I talked with them I could see in their eyes and in their demeanour, that like us we are all still experiencing a time to be, to see, and to feel.

On the same apostolic frontier, in early September, I met a Marist Brother, by the name of Iñigo, who comes from the north Basque country of Spain, as well as Vero from Argentina and Peggy from Venezuela, both Marist Lay volunteers and who, along with another Brother from Australia (who had not yet arrived because of visa issues), form part of the first missionary community in which lay and religious live together, sharing the same spirituality and mission. All together we formed a beautiful friendship. Those with more experience of volunteering encouraged and helped us with all the thoughts, feelings and concerns that present themselves on such missions. Finding God in them encourages me to keep persevering with this mission.

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I attended a seminar on "Procedures to be understood in cases of situations or signs of human trafficking". It is very sad and disturbing to discover through the testimony and conversations with other participants, all that is involved in human trafficking (sexual exploitation, child labor, migrant labor, organ trafficking, child trafficking, etc.), and to realise again that the most vulnerable areas where this occurs are precisely the margins of society, where people can move in and out with ease. It is not easy, people are afraid to report any incidence or signs of trafficking, for many it is easier to keep quiet and let things be. The hope is to be able to organize groups of people from different sectors of society in these 'frontier' areas who would first sensitize the community to the situation and then publicize it to better attack this evil present in this area.

I was in the City of Santa Rosa (on the Peruvian border) with Fr Pablo Mora SJ, who goes there on Sunday to celebrate mass. It was good to share the celebration of mass with the few people who attend and observe the work of Maneca, the only indigenous pastoral worker for a population of about 2500 people. The lack of catechists and pastoral workers on these sides of the border is desperate. Those that are still there are old and tired; their training and manner of evangelization is no longer attractive to young people.



Without being critical, simply reporting what I saw here and what people with whom I spoke to told me can be summarised as follows: " for a long time the Catholic Church (bishops, priests and religious) have forgotten and neglected some areas of the Amazon and there is now a strong presence of other churches that instead of working together for the development of the whole community, have instead brought about divisions".

I also participated in a training workshop on Pastoral Sociology for specialists in the field from the Vicariate of Leticia. I got to know a little about REPAM and the spirituality of Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon (rites, customs, lifestyle), especially about the four major communities in this area (Tikunas, Cocamas, Uitotos and Yaguas). In sharing with the other participants, I learnt of the various forms of apostolic work in the parishes and that the range of possibilities for work is diverse, depending on the individual's call and gifts.

I had a meeting with the pastoral team to plan visits to 3 missing communities (Zaragoza, Freedom and Puerto Tirunfo) that will close the first part of the visit and period of observation of the riverside communities of the Amazon on the Colombian border.

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I was very excited and it made me happy to meet again and chat with Fernando López SJ. and Arizete, a religious Canon regular from Brazil, whom I had met before and who had accompanied me for a few days on this mission. The spiritual direction time with Fernando was very helpful, and I needed this heart to heart conversation with someone who had lived and still lives the experience of integrating with the local community.

I had a pleasant surprise when I saw Marita from Puerto Rico who was a CLC member and whom I had met during Magis 2 in Quito some years ago. God is truly unpredictable and touches our hearts at different locations of this our common home and in his own time calls us to come together to celebrate life from this corner of our Amazon. She too is starting her two years' voluntary work in the Mobile Team and in the days up to mid-November we will be directing and helping to form the community. Gifts of God.

And I cannot fail to mention my new friends Tere and Lolo, volunteers who are already finishing their one-year experience in the Mobile Team. They are a couple of young Spaniards, full of simplicity, sensitivity and commitment to our brothers and sisters on this piece of land that cries out for our help.



I share my day to day with Robby, my friend and co-worker who maps out the work of Fe y Alegría. Anyway, my heart is full of names and faces who, like me, without much certainty, throw themselves at the deep end of this call of the heart to live this voluntary work experience.

It has been a time for meetings, getting to know people, reflections, spiritual direction, listening, talking, giving, welcoming and celebrating. I'm realising that volunteering is a fundamental experience in people's life because I believe it helps you encounter yourself,

and others, in a natural way and with God.

This contact with people we call "poor" strikes you like a thorn that goes deep inside you and makes you realize that they are in truth rich because they live contented with very little, because they do not question what happens to them, because they are always looking at the positive side of situations, because they enjoy and appreciate everything,

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even in the most difficult situations, because they cry and get up again. I learnt a lot from them.

Finally, I'll borrow a phrase from a very poor person who has no work or land to plant who lives in the district of La Union in Leticia, and who with a smile says "a dog that walks, finds a bone". Every day he rises hoping to pick up something to eat and share with his family, that's true faith in God, that is wisdom. And you, how do you live God? Do you have the same gratitude for what happens in your everyday life? Do you have that same faith in that God who has shown you ad nauseam His love? You who enjoy



the comfort of your home, your community, your room, and the comfort of having a job and not knowing what is scarcity. Look around you, give thanks, feel indignant of the situations of injustice, exclusion and poverty, but above all find out how you can engage and contribute in a small way to transform those situations that do nothing but widen the gap between rich and poor, situations that increase the destruction of our common home.

It has been only a few months and yet I'm feeling that something is changing in me, that my perspective is not the same, that inside me God is recreating me every day of this journey through my dear Amazon and is asking me to be bread that with all my limitations and gifts that the Lord has given me is broken and shared every day.