

Celebrate

Month by month I have been briefly sharing this experience that, with all its ups and downs, has already reached the sixth month. How fast time goes by! I'm halfway there. Of course, it's time to stop, pause, be silent and let go, and discover how God has been manifesting during all this time while working with the Society of Jesus and with CLC.

December is a very short month because we have two celebrations: Christmas and New Year, which practically leaves the month with only 15 days. The best of this month has been the Christmas Missions that I experienced living with the community of Nazareth, a community with approximately 1000 inhabitants, most of the ethnic group Tikuna. They were 10 days in which God manifested Himself generously through the children and young people with whom the Capuchin missionaries and I mainly worked.



These missions are organized by the Congregation of the Capuchin Fathers who have their mission for many years here in the Amazon. As a volunteer, I was joined in the missions by a Chilean Jesuit theologian, Juan Pablo Becker. In this region of the Triple Border the Jesuits do not have a specific project of their own, but instead have chosen to support the activities and projects that are already there in the Vicariate at the time.

I must thank God a lot because during this month, his face was more evident in each child with whom I shared life while preparing the carols, learning of their difficult life stories, children who at such a young age of 9, 11 and 13 had already lost their parents and live with their grandparents. Children so in need of affection, of closeness and hugs, that they regularly woke up early excited to begin our activities with them. In these 10 days, I acted as choir master, parish teacher, psychologist, interior designer, catechist, lawyer, etc. With so much closeness and affection from all sides, the heart feels so small amid so many signs of affection. Some girls even wanted to identify with Paola (a Franciscan lay missionary in Pasto) and me, by asking their parents to buy them glasses and hats like the ones we had, which we thought was rather cute. But when we were told on the last day "we are going to miss you because you are the only ones who want us", we were left speechless but thankful because in fact it was they who opened their hearts to us.

It was also days of getting to know Paola and being able to share her life story, which like many lives had its broken dreams and failures, its joys and happiness. God does not stop bringing into in my life people, who through those "God-incidences", I can reach to, listen and receive their lives. This attitude helps me a lot and I can learn more throughout this journey.

Also, in the middle of the Novena, we had a meeting with the catechists of the riverine communities. From next year, after studying their needs, we plan to begin a process of formation for them and future leaders of the communities who need so much new encouragement and help to awaken and renew faith in their communities. There were 40 people who attended and the meeting was led by Fr. Valerio Sartor SJ. It was a meeting for sharing personal experiences and making suggestions for the work of evangelization. We hope that Jesus will continue to bless this small project.



At the end of the novena we had the packed Chapel on Christmas Eve. There was not even room for a pin, they were even sitting on the floor. They all wanted to share and joyfully celebrate the Birthday of Jesus: the children prepared two dances to the Baby Jesus. It was a different Christmas, away from technology and the media, full of so many activities that time flew by. The only thing I missed was Christmas Eve with my beloved family. On the 25th, Christmas Day, I received your calls, all full of affection, and filled my heart with joy.

And the gift that God gave me at the end of this mission was being able to travel and share with my family New Year. As a matter of fact, initially the period of my volunteering was planned to run for a year without interruption, but since here in Colombia it is school holiday time in December and January, my missionary companions and the Jesuits of the PAMSJ traveled to their countries of origin to spend the end of the year and their annual vacations there. So as not to be alone in Leticia they agreed that I also could travel for a few days to spend the end of the year with my family. My father generously paid for my ticket, and I could share with them these festive days in which I have been able to recharge my spirit through their tender loving care.

I was so excited to see again my father, my brothers, my sisters-in-law and my nieces - especially my nieces who even shed some tears of emotion. Of course, I do not forget my four-legged daughter (Titina), I was happy to see how she gets on so well with my dad and how he looks after her while I am away. To me the family, my family is the best gift that God could have given me in this life, they are a great support in this mission. I was also able to see again my friends and meet with my CLC community. I had a long chat with Mauricio López sharing the lights and shadows of these 6 months of voluntary experience. Hoping to open the way for those who will come after me.

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With all that I have lived I feel that it has been a time to celebrate life, joy, family, and to experience Jesus quietly being born in our hearts, day by day, and encouraging me to continue to find Him in everything that I am living.

The friendship and the reunions were time to recharge for the next 6 months that are left.

Finally, I want to finish this brief account with this sentence of Pedro Casaldáliga:

"For me, a spiritual man or woman is one who lives in depth, who assumes options worthy of a human life. Be consistent, be open to the needs of others. Celebrate life. "

Despite all our human limitations, I feel that if we allow ourselves to be carried away by Jesus, our heart, sooner or later, will not be able to resist listening to the call. We cannot see our broken world and remain indifferent without contributing a 'grain of sand', probably insignificant true, but it is better than not doing anything.



Our spirituality challenges us to be consistent between what we preach and what we do. We must "put love more in works than in words" as Ignatius of Loyola says. Maybe the world will remain the same, but I am no longer the same now, there is a before and after this experience. I invite those who are feeling this call to consider it seriously and entrust themselves to the hands of God, so that they can embrace those invitations that God alone puts in our hearts.

To all those who accompany me by reading these short accounts, month by month, I wish you a year 2017 full of passion and joy for what we do and from wherever we are always try to share the love we receive daily from our Good Father.