

A TESTIMONY

Based on the Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Mission Sunday, 2021, I would like to send a short article that will focus essentially on my Missionary experience in Haiti. The highlight of this experience will be the earthquake on August 14, 2021, focusing on BEFORE, DURING and AFTER.

Without getting too emotional, I will look back on what I experienced during this time.

Mission according to Pope Francis' Message, "is not something of the past nor a romantic memory of love".

"Today, Jesus needs hearts capable of living a true story of love, which makes them go out to the peripheries of the world and become messengers and instruments of compassion."

BEFORE:

In October 2020, I visited our mission's Nutrition/Health Center and was delighted and motivated to start a new mission. This opportunity to have compassion or "suffer with" is undoubtedly a responsibility. Seeing, listening was the time of adaptation while learning a little Creole language. In this first phase I felt how necessary our presence as FMOL is.

DURING:

On August 14, 2021, I got up at 7:00 am. After the hygiene rituals, the prayer of Lauds and breakfast, I started to review my week life and mission, as usual.

At 8:20 am, a loud noise started along with the descent and ascending from our house. It came to me: it's an **Earthquake!** I immediately got under the bed. I experienced the four minutes and two seconds, with a magnitude/intensity of 7.2 on the Richter Scale. It was an unbelievable experience to see how hard the walls cracked, how objects fell, how the bed slid according to the movements of the earthquake. I prayed and called Sister Nordette who replied that she was fine. But the noise prevented people from hearing each other. When the earthquake calmed down, I heard the porter's voice asking: "Sister Helena, are you ok?" I replied: yes. He later reported to me that when he heard my voice he breathed a sigh of relief. So, he said: "Get out and throw yourself from the first floor and I'll put something down so you don't get hurt". The house was hit hard.

I thought: the Lord who saved me will continue to protect me. I'll get down on my own feet." So it happened. I tried to check the nearest exit and managed to find a door that wasn't blocked. Thanked God! When I left, I came across Sister Nordette, very tearful, thinking the same thing as the porter. I hugged her and told her: "don't cry, I'm fine". She kept crying saying, "I thought you were under the rubble! Our house was hit hard! I had the reflex to leave and I saw everything fall apart up!" Indeed, "the Lord's loving predilection surprises us and works wonders"!

As with the first Christians, difficulties are not a reason for withdrawal, but rather a challenge to turn every inconvenience or difficulty into an opportunity for mission. As for them, what moves me, encourages, excites and motivates me is found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Difficulties unite us to Christ, maturing the "conviction that God can act in any circumstance, even in the midst of apparent failures" and the certainty that "a person who offers himself and gives himself to God for love will surely be fruitful".

THE AFTER:

Great challenges lie ahead, as the earthquake revealed: increased suffering at physical, psychological, spiritual, social and other levels. As the prophet Jeremiah says, "this experience is the burning fire of His active presence in our hearts that impels us" to the mission, even if at times it involves sacrifices and misunderstandings. (Cf.20:7-9) It's worth it! Spirit is always on the move and sets us in motion to share the most beautiful and promising proclamation: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1.4).

Faced with this reality, what to do?

*Listen to the anguish, sadness and discouragement of those who lost everything;

*Provide spaces for people who want to sleep;

*Building tents to care for the sick, as the centers and hospitals were also hit without providing any security;

*Crying with those who cry;

*Participate in your despair by developing hope. The most vulnerable felt even more their fragility as they lost "Everything" including their families.

As a reward, gratitude begins and the increase of brotherhood and our own security, as we are with them.

In these moments of earthquake, the mission of compassion is urgent, from sleeping in the street, eating the same meals, caring for the sick... This is the time to promote the fraternity and friendship of Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. In Pope Francis' message for World Mission Day 2021, "living the mission is venturing into cultivating the same feelings as Christ Jesus and believing that the person next to me is also my brother, my sister, awakening my love to them." My/our attention and concern turned to people. In a message for World Mission Sunday, the Holy Father writes: "your feet are dusty on the road that leads you to the most disadvantaged and forgotten." "Your dreams are in the attentive look to your neighbor, developing the hope of better days". .

EVERYTHING is MISSION, by MISSION and for the MISSION. This life experience is as beautiful as it is improvised.

To finish this testimony-article, I highlight the phrase of His Holiness Pope Francis: "putting oneself in a 'missionary state' is a reflection of GRATITUDE."

My thanks for accepting this sharing of mine.

Sr Helena Isabel Correia Rodrigues Silva

FMNS