

## The respect for each person



When I was 12 years old, to celebrate my Birthday, we went to the movies. Then we saw missionaries walking with the people who lived in the forest. I found it was wonderful. That image has always stayed with me. Then I went to school with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. I didn't like that school very much because I thought those sisters were always very sad. But somehow, because of my uncle White Father who lived in Africa, I was still attracted to go there but not as a nun. So, I went as a lay person and it was in Burundi. There my joy was immense to see the Ladies of Mary (DMJ) happy. When I returned, I told myself that I was going to be a DMJ. But my parents thought that I had to know the world to have a solid experience of life first, otherwise

it would not work. However before long I entered with the DMJ and everything was always good. What I didn't like and I was always looking for, is why we were always living at the mission but not among the people!

My parents had said that my brothers and sisters could come and visit me in Burundi. At one point one of my sisters and her husband wanted to come and visit me but that was in 1972 and there were great difficulties due to the ethnic conflicts there. So, this trip was not an option. I had to inform the sisters in Bujumbura but the means of communication were not as developed as they are today, so the question was how, thus, I had to make the trip to Bujumbura. I wanted to drive but I didn't want to go alone and couldn't find anyone who could accompany me. It was Pedro, a White Father who was starting in Bunzogi (on the Gatara side of Kayanza province) to settle with the pygmies, who said that he could accompany me. It was then during this trip that I was able to meet Pedro and share much with him about his apostolate. Afterwards I helped him to build his little house in Bunzogi. This meeting encouraged me to continue my calling.

I really wanted to live with the people and since this was not yet possible in Africa, we went to Latin America; to Ecuador in the Diocese of Riobamba where Monsignor Leonidas Proaño was Bishop and promoter of Liberation Theology; that is, the consideration of the whole person. He was interested in whether the person has food, a house: children can go to school, etc. He was also interested in whether the person has a place to live. There we were able to be in a community of indigenous people and we lived with them. It was great, there were holy people there. There I was able to realize how God works in people; it is not the outside that you have to see but the inside of the person. So, we were able to do a lot of things. We trained nurses, built a small school; we made windmills, etc. I was able to see how God works in people. But since we were very busy with a lot of things, we had to be careful because there were political parties that wanted to manipulate us, but we didn't agree to join a political party because we wanted to remain free. Monsignor Proaño understood, and told us that it was better for us to leave. So, we went back to Africa.

On our return to Africa, we went to the Democratic Republic of Congo, called Zaire at that time. There too we had the Bishop's agreement to live with the Bambuti (Batwa of Congo). He said that since the Church had been present (100 years at that time), the Bambuti went to the Mission but the Church was

not at their place. So, from a parish, we were able to contact the Bambuti little by little and we asked if they agreed to let us live in their camps. As the Bambuti were in the hands of the Bantus, we had to have the agreement of the Bantus to be able to live with the Bambuti. It was not as easy as we had thought. It was beautiful there too. Another White Father; Father Felix joined us after 6 years and in all we lived there for 15 years. We built a small school, many of the Bambuti became teachers.

The Bambuti are good hunters and people love them for the meat they provide. When the hunt had been successful, they could exchange it for a few bananas or a small piece of cloth, etc. We then encouraged them to get fields to get their own bananas, peanuts, and other products they needed. Afterwards we worked with Bantu animators who were also in our way of thinking and it was very nice.

But then the Bishop had to leave and the one who succeeded him said that we had to go to another Mission because everything has to go from the missions to the missions. He did not want us to live in the community of the Bambuti. However, we had contact with many Bantu villages and everything was going well. However since we had chosen to live with the Bambuti and we did not want to be in conflict with the Bishop, we preferred to leave, the three of us altogether: Father Felix, Father Pedro and myself.

What the Bambuti taught me was "Hospitality"- a very warm welcome to others and that still helps me today. This mission wasn't easy, but I felt that this is what I was called to do. I had Pedro's support but above all the strength of the Eucharist. Many did not understand me even among the DMJ because there were some who asked me why I did not marry Pedro. I did not even think about it as it would have taken away Pedro's priesthood: he would no longer be Pedro. His life was the Eucharist. The most important thing for me was to be able to receive the Lord and through Him enter into this Trinitarian love that is incredible. His Spirit enlivens us and I need that every day, I wouldn't know how to live otherwise. Up-to- now, the Eucharist has been the centre of my life; to be able to participate in it every day is for me an incomparable grace. Thanks to Pedro who helped me to have this openness to the Eucharistic grace. I would say that what also helped me a lot was a great devotion to the Virgin Mary that I inherited from my mother. Until today the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist are my great resources.

**Sr. Doecita**