

Relive the Fatima Experience

Fatima, Tuesday 8/12: Day 1

The place chosen for the assembly is a pilgrimage house, about 10 minutes walk from the Shrine of Fatima.

We started the journey in the chapel.



Ann Marie with our home-made American flag at the corner

The assembly opened in a wonderfully boisterous anticipation with delegations from 66 countries around the world. It was so fitting that we gathered in the chapel, around the presence of Christ. Each country let her color fly upon the announcement of the country; amidst applauses. I could not help but to be aware that I was the only Vietnamese at the assembly, and I am part of the USA delegation. There were consolation and desolation in my feeling. Oh, I wish that there would be a Vietnamese flag among so many colors on that balcony. “Well, let get back to the present... God is gathering all these communities around the world to Fatima... and He is so much alive in the very humanity of us here,” I told myself.

There was a very gentle consolation taking me deep into my heart when I looked around. Many ethnics. Many different cultures. Many languages. And amidst all those differences, there were sincere greetings from one stranger to another like dear friends for ages. The faces may be estranged, but the hearts are so close to one another. We speak in one language spiritually: Ignatian. We all share one life style: our CLC Charism. The desire to love God more seemed to gather us all into one body. With Love and Grace, the so small number of only a little over 200, in comparing to over 6,000,000,000 of the world, actually allowed me to see in whole a Church so much alive in a chaotic and challenging world of ours. Perhaps, this is God’s invitation for all of us to embrace the greatness of Christ deep into our bone so that our very lives become the concrete presence of Christ in our world.



“We have traveled in a thousand roads, a thousand ways, and arrived at a thousand moments.” How true! “We are called, personally and communally, as an apostolic body to bring Good News to the

world,” and with that we began the first part of the assembly, which is to “come to rest under God’s gaze and tell what we have done, taught and learned.” Each national community would tell their story to the assembly. There were 66 countries, so you can image the time it would take to listen to 66 stories. I was amazed at the patience and the attentiveness that we had the entire time, maybe because we sought to listen with the heart. Among the common struggles of communities that we are familiar with, there were communities that struggled and grew out of tragedies and suffering of incredible proportion in countries like Rwanda, Zimbabwe. Stories of those communities removed all the noise from the assembly hall and what left was only the voice telling story echoed faintly like from a far distance away by the same line in other languages of the translators. The grace of CLC amazingly found root in people’s hearts and sprung forwards with so much life and love amidst murdering hatred. It brought hope. God made himself present in the middle of these tragedies, and now we were learning to live as one body, apostolically, to feel and embrace the pain of our brothers and sisters from afar in the world who were totally estranged to us a few hours ago. Strangely, these stories actually immersed me in deep consolation, and I was confirmed again that CLC is such a “precious stone” that God has put into our hands. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what shall we do with this “precious stone?” How shall we respond to God’s call for us?



It was the 12th and there was procession on front of the Shrine of Fatima, a mere 10 minutes walks away. Ann Marie, Angelique, and some of use ventured out into the night toward the square. We stopped to buy some candles on the way. When we arrived, the square was a sea of flickering lights. The procession started at the small chapel on the left of the square marking the spot where Mary appeared to the three children. It was around 10, and people were everywhere, candles in hands. The Hail Mary was recited in many languages. I saw of young children, holding candles in their tiny hands, singing with so much joy in their voice. Our Church is very much alive indeed! I saw a family pushing another person succumbed to the gravity of his tired body on a wheelchair. Two middle aged women walked by. They turned and greeted the family, asking about the person on the wheelchair. They then embraced him and kissed him on the forehead and wished him “la paz de Dios.” Such things between strangers in this materialistic reality of our world are indeed rare, but they were images of love, of the spirit of “cura personalis” that we are trying to instill in our communities.

I stayed to attend mass with Mary Balfe of Canada. A bishop presided the mass, and there must be more than 100 priests concelebrating. I offered Mary our community and asked that she would always watch upon us so that each one of us would seek to find God’s will in our ordinary lives, and that CLC-USA will become more concrete each day the God’s dream for us all. Mass ended around midnight. We left the square that was still filled with flickering lights.



It was a day full of grace. You have sent us and thus the grace received is for all of us so that we can share in one common mission. How shall we respond to God's call for us in our world as one apostolic body?

In Christ,
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