



FRIENDS

THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF
ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

MARCH 2021



No Hay Temor en el Amor, There's No Fear in Love (1 John 4, 18)

Dear Friends,

Fr. Isaias Gerali, of the Archdiocese of Cebu, Philippines, joined the St. James Society in 2015. After completing a five month language study program in Lima he was assigned to the Diocese of Sicuani, high in the Peruvian Andes. He served as Pastor in the parish of Colquamarca and took care of two other parishes in the province, which previously did not have a resident priest before his arrival. As happens so often with missionaries, time goes by very quickly; Fr. Isaias has completed his five year commitment and is now returning to Cebu where he will take up a new pastoral assignment. I invited Fr. Isaias to reflect with us on his time in Peru:

I am a Filipino diocesan missionary priest from the Archdiocese of Cebu, Philippines. The privilege of serving as a missionary priest in South America was what I had prayed for, as an unworthy servant of God. To go beyond the borders of my home country was my wish and calling! I volunteered to go on mission with 'The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle' and they assigned me to Peru, to a province of the Peruvian Andes, near the borders of Bolivia and Chile. It is located in the Sierra region of Peru with an altitude of 4,000 meters plus, above sea level.

Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor in Latin America since 1958.



Thankful for Christmas Panetone cakes and food baskets

I arrived here during the second quarter of 2015 and these last five years have passed quickly for me, almost unnoticeably, with so much work to do and so many to minister to. While many experiences stand out from these past five years, the most poignant is how I found great Love here, amidst a most humble people. I am reminded of the wise and assuring words of my theology seminary formator (Father Ned C.M.) when he stated, “God awaits us in the mission and that should lie in every missionary’s heart”. When I arrived in Peru, I started ministering in three mission parishes of Colquemarca, Ccapacmarca and

Chamaca. All of these belong to the then Prelature of Sicuani, now a Diocese, in the region of Cusco. Two years after my arrival, two more missionary priests arrived, one from Arequipa, Peru, the other from Mexico, and they assumed responsibility for the parishes of Ccapacmarca and Chamaca.

As I settled into the region and learned about the culture, I realized that these lovely people essentially survive by eating what they sow. The land is their life, their Mother Earth, the *Pachamama*. The *Pachamama* provides enough sustenance for all the local people to survive and to send their children to school. In the ranges and plateaus of the Andes the people typically cultivate potatoes, quinoa, wheat, corn and raise sheep, cows, alpacas and llamas for sale in the markets all over the province. They spend most of their time in what gives them life, and hope, towards a better way of living. They sell the bulk of the harvest during the “market day” - or *día del mercado*. What remains after their sale, is then used for family consumption. Most of the people do not own their own land. Instead, they are paid to tend and harvest land for other more fortunate



Fr. Isaias helping harvest potatoes

landowners. Many of them also send their youth, once high school is completed, to work in big cities as farmers, salesgirls or domestic helpers. With so much time spent on farming and labor, the locals have little time and few diversions from hard work, to gain what they considered a “sustainable life”. These occasional diversions include public gatherings such as weekly market days, fairs and an occasional bullfighting event. Only a handful of these locals attend Mass regularly. This is understandable since, for many years, they never benefited from any spiritual formation or evangelization. Also, they lacked priests or religious brothers and sisters



and any religious brothers and sisters in the region. The survival to live and the care for the land highlights why the Mission is indispensable in all places at all times. The mission is responsible for helping the local parishioners recognize that life is not just about surviving to live but also is about living fully and freely in trust and in faith of the Creator, the overall owner and Creator of the land. Learning to always be thankful to God, who makes the seeds grow and bear fruit, is a theme the Mission emphasizes continually. Each baptized person is called to be especially concerned with our neighbors in need, more than we are concerned with ourselves. Each neighbor should receive our patience, understanding, forgiveness and our generosity.

Why are we doing this? We do this because we believe that we are born out of love, the Trinity's love. "Love does no evil to his neighbor", as the Apostle Paul told us. We do



Boys praying over Springtime planting

trust God's promise that if two of us agree on earth about anything for which we pray, then our prayers will be granted to us by our Heavenly Father. We must agree with one another, therefore, in love, by love and for love. We are so richly blessed! It is our common mission to share with the local people the truth of His unconditional love. In sharing it, we must demonstrate this unconditional love and they, in turn, will also love unconditionally. As for my people, in the Mission, they will also come to know, hopefully soon, that Our Lord is inviting them to come to Him in their weariness caused by



hard work. It is our hope that they will believe that with Our Lord's help, their yoke will feel easy and their burden light.

When I look back to 2015, when I first joined the Society of St. James, I realized how little I knew about missionary work, but the chance to join became for me, where the compass was pointed, my North Pole. I was wholly drawn to the possibility to become a missionary. I had little understanding of what this would entail but I was sure that God would be with me, wherever the St. James Society would send me. God is indeed the Love who awaited me there and who has been with God's people and who, Himself, wanted such love to remain in everyone. Colquemarca





is not only a natural haven for gold, but also a rich soil for the “real treasure of the Church”- the poor, (St. Lawrence, the deacon). Love is missionary in essence; the true self-giving. Our Lord invites us to offer our lives to Him as He gave Himself up to us through His cross. Jesus was always on the go, from one town to another. We have to come out of our comfort zones by loving others as ourselves. Please continue then to support the missions as your way of sharing in Christ’s perfect sacrifice and as living out your missionary calling, which is to love others. The generous friends of the Society, living in God’s love, are His living testimony.



On a personal note, I am forever grateful to the Fr. David Costello for this rare opportunity to serve the mission. Please continue to help the Missionary Society of St. James, in any way you can, especially by your prayers and donations, and please carry this love for others and evangelize in your day-to-day life since - **WHAT IS GOOD IS NEVER FINISHED.**

Sincere thanks to Fr. Isaias for his inspiring and joyful presence among us since 2015. I was speaking with Bishop Pedro Bustamante recently by telephone and he shared his sadness at losing two of our St. James Missionary priests as they return to their home diocese, and he remarked how Fr. Isaias would be such a huge loss to the priests of the Diocese of Sicuani, and to the parishioners of Colquamarca. We are most grateful to Fr. Isaias and indeed to Archbishop Palma of Cebu for allowing Fr. Isaias to realize his dream of moving beyond the borders of his home country so that he could become a living sign of God’s Love, Peace, and Joy high in the Peruvian Andes. I have no doubt he returns to Cebu all the richer for his lived experience in Colquamarca, Peru. Finally, please pray for Fr. Joe Bibby of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, UK, who will replace Fr. Isaias in Colquamarca once it is possible for him to travel to Peru.

With Every Good Wish in Christ,

Rev. David Costello, Director



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