

Laudato Si' 2020

Theme: "Everything is Connected"

A 9 day Retreat

16 – 24 May 2020



19 May 2020

Capuchin GEM (Green Environment Movement) – JPIC Office - OFM Capuchins

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and Good.

To commemorate the 5th year anniversary of Laudato Si', we invite you to join us in a 9 day retreat.

Each day, we will provide you with materials from which you can find inspiration. We will end each session with a short conclusion. All that is required of you is to provide yourself a few minutes each day to find a quiet place to read and reflect in peace.

For today, Day 4, we have three topics:

1. Nowhere to lay His head
2. Feed my lambs
3. Nature's Pharmacy and many more...

We close the three topics with a conclusion.

Happy reading and God bless you always!

Office of the JPIC, OFM Capuchins

I. Nowhere to lay His head

⁵⁷ As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."⁵⁸ Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." - Luke 9:57-58

Kalbay! We arrived at Kalbay early in the morning. It took us several hours of ride in an 'outrigger boat' to get there. Shortly after, patients started coming. Our work has begun!

As usual, the number of patients was overwhelming. In our mission areas at Jose Abad Santos, we would treat an average of 100 or more patients in a day. To keep myself going, I would take a deep breath, take a gulp of water and smile at the next patient. Our hosts would usually offer us some food while consultations are going on. In order that I would not feel guilty eating something while a long line of patients are hungrily watching me, I would often break the food into pieces and offer some to my patients. We eat, talk and heal at the same time. The children love it! They would smile, grab a piece of the food, forget all their fears and allow me to examine them with my stethoscope. I know some of my

colleagues would frown on this practice but I am in the peripheries and the setup is far from ideal. When a small room is filled up with close to a hundred patients, with dogs and children under your examining table, and mothers running around to find their children because their turn to be examined has come, you do not have any more time to go out and eat. Luckily this time, the consultations were done on a porch so we had more breathing space.

Before the end of the day, we ran out of antibiotics for infants but still more mothers are arriving with their babies. All I had left were decongestants, mucolytics and antipyretics. I tried to make the best of what is available and gave the mothers instructions on how to care for their sick babies. A week after that, I received news that one of the babies I treated for cough died. The cough developed into severe pneumonia and as usual, there was no adequate medical assistance available in the area. I never forget my deceased patients. They are already part of my life.

It was already night time when we were finally able to rest. I was tired. The friar who helped me care for the patients was also tired. We talked a little after supper. In a short while, he started snoring.

I was tired but I cannot sleep. I went out of the mission house and sat at the porch. I took a deep breath and made a silent prayer, "Well Lord, here I am and there you are..." and then, silence. There are no more words to say. Words are no longer needed. I just sat in the presence of the Lord and He kept me company. And then it struck me: "The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head". At that instant, the passage had a deeper meaning for me. When you see a lot of suffering around you and you only have 'two fishes and five loaves of bread' to offer, how can you lay your head to rest? There are just so many things to do. In moments like this, I have learned that the best recourse is what the apostles did. Go to the Lord! Give Him the two fishes and five loaves and ask Him to multiply them a thousand fold. And do you know what happens afterwards? He always does it!

II. Feed my lambs

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

- John 21:15

Whenever we conduct medical missions or open the parish office for consultations, we often have a small donation box with a message: 'Halad ko, tabang ko' (My offering, my help). Br. Renante Sasi, one of the brothers who helped me make the Capuchin Medical Mission a reality, coined that phrase. The patients know that whatever money they put in it will be used to help other patients. These small gestures by the patients have kept our mission going even in the lean months when we do not receive support from outside sources. The patients we treat help fund the medicines for the next group of patients. We always have just enough funds to keep the mission going.

It happened more than once when a malnourished mother carrying a malnourished baby would come to me for help. The situation will almost always be the same: (1) The baby is malnourished and weak (2) The mother is also malnourished and weak (3) The mother cannot breastfeed the baby because no milk is coming out of her breast. (4) The mother is afraid that her baby might die.

I look at my guests and what I see is a sick and hungry mother forgetting her sickness and hunger in

order to provide food and healing for her baby. When I ask where the father is, the mother would often look down. It is usually two things, she is a widow or her husband abandoned her to care for her children alone. The mothers try their best to make ends meet. They deprive themselves of food in order to feed their children. While doing that, they are simultaneously breastfeeding their babies. Soon they become more and more malnourished until they no longer have milk to give.

I would go to the donation box, get some money and go to the store with the mother. We buy some milk and feeding bottles. We return to the clinic and I treat the mother and the baby, give them vitamins and pray hard that things will get better for them soon. We find joy whenever we receive news that a baby survived. I never knew whatever happened to the rest.

Do you love me Peter? Feed my lambs.

III. Nature's pharmacy and many more...

One time, I was navigating a river with a tribal elder who is also a healer. He was showing me one herbal plant after another along the river and along the trails. He would give me names and healing properties of the plants. The information I received was so many that I could not memorize anything anymore. I was already suffering from information overload. But one vine stuck in my mind. I could not remember anymore its name (Information fatigue!) but I still remember how it's heart-shaped leaf and its rough stalk look like. The healer plucked one stalk from the vine and told me that it is used to treat toothache. I chewed the stalk and true enough, it released a minty tasted that was refreshing to the mouth. It reminds me of the dental fillings I used to receive when I sit in the dentist's chair.

Many times, the indigenous people would tell me that nature is their pharmacy, food market, hardware store and temple. All of them are true!

Nature as pharmacy

I prefer to have good collaborations with tribal healers because when we work together, the people benefit much, much more. Whenever patient ask me if they can combine both western and tribal medicine I give them the affirmative answer. When I ran out of medicines, I turn to nature to supplement the healing remedies. My favorites are: (1) Aloe vera for burns and wounds. Its anesthetic properties immediately lessen the pain of the burn or the wound. I also noticed how the wound and the surrounding skin often improve after 24 hours. (2) Guava leaf infusions. These helped me a lot in treating weeping wounds and infected wounds. (3) Oregano leaves for cough. I usually place one leaf in a cup of hot water and drink it as a tea. I do not squeeze the leaf because it makes the tea bitter. Gentle infusion makes it more palatable. I cup of the tea three times a day for three days is often enough to get good results. If it still does not work then we already need antibiotics. (In the peripheries, we do not have laboratories so we treat empirically). The throat usually becomes a little itchy on the second day but improves afterwards. (4) Betel nut is quite unique. It assuages hunger. I discovered it during a survival training given to us by the Agta elders. The betel helped keep me from feeling hungry all the time.

Food Market

Knowing which plants are edible makes trips in the trail lighter and more fun.

One time, we were on our way back to the village after the elders taught the brothers some survival skills and we passed by some rasp berries. We carefully pick out the berries making sure not to touch its leaves because they can be very itchy. Walking back with berries in our hands and mouths made the trip much more pleasurable.

Hardware store

Temporary shelters made from materials of nature provide protection from the elements. A tribal leader once taught me a lesson on walking gently on the land through these shelters. It was already morning and we have just made it through the night in our makeshift shelters. I started creating a fire in order to clean the area I used during the night. I placed the used shelter materials in the fire when the tribal leader approached me. He told me in a very genial way that they do not burn the used shelter materials. They just leave it behind and allow nature to reclaim it. Because I was a bit stubborn I let the fire continue a bit before I let it die down. I realized he was right but I was too proud to admit it immediately. When I observed their shelters, they were made of very light materials and they used the materials to the minimum. He is right, with those light materials it is easy for nature to reclaim the area without the dirty black scars of fire and without the danger of the fire spreading out to the land. It will also not trap any unsuspecting animals because the materials they used are very minimal.

Nature as temples

I placed this last because temple experiences are often too sublime for words. I would just like to say that we noticed and experienced that the more preserved creation is the deeper are the spiritual and mystical experiences one will have.

“³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”– Psalm 19:3-4

If you want to know more about this, experience is the best teacher.

Conclusion

The first time the Agtas brought us with them to the forest, the tribal leader said: “Today, we will show you our culture.” Looking back, I agree very much with him. But nature is not only the culture of the indigenous people it is also the culture of the rest of humankind. We are slowly losing our culture and our heritage as more and more forests are being destroyed.

I want our future generations to still experience the joy in the peripheries. The joy that nature brings. I still want them to have the heritage that we have received and cherished in our lifetime.

Whenever I tie my hammock on two trees and take a short nap on a hot summer day, I almost always feel like being placed back into the womb of mother nature. The wind would gently caress my back through the hammock netting and the sun would counter the coolness with its heat. Birds would sing their distinct songs, allowing me to identify some of their species and have a general idea of where they are. The soft creaking of three branches is like the creaking of a wooden cradle which gently lulls me to sleep. Soon, beautiful and meaningful dreams greet me and guide me.

While other places are busy creating concrete forests, the wooden forests are slowly dwindling. This is the reason why I am hoping that we Capuchins can make a difference somehow. We need to rebuild the forests. We need to plant more greens. We need to replace the dwindling green patches of the earth with new and vibrant green patches of our convents and the lands entrusted to our care. We also need to extend this green patches to the homes of the people we serve to provide them with sustenance especially at this time when quarantines have caused many people hunger. We will be talking more about this dream in the days to come.

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

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