

Ethiopia, 31st May 2016
Feast of the Visitation

LETTER FROM THE FRONTIER VII

Dear Friends,

I know a lot of time has elapsed since my last letter, and many events have occurred, not the least being my absence from the mission for much longer than I expected due to the illness of Estefania, (our missionary from the Canary Islands), who needed to return home for further investigation, after extensive tests in Addis, on my return from the UK. Please keep her in your prayers. I returned to the Mission in time for the Ethiopian Holy Week, in fact it was Holy Thursday when Belen and myself arrived back!

In the second week of Easter (according to the Ethiopian calendar), we had an important event in the life of the Tamara Women, which was a seminar with Zerihun Aseffa, from Addis, an expert in helping people get their lives sorted out and start to “stand on their own two feet”. He used various examples to illustrate different topics, and for one week the ladies were fully engaged in thinking about their futures, what they wanted and how they would go about it.



He encouraged them to think beyond just making purses, even if they are so very beautiful etc., and to use all that they had learnt as a stepping stone to “go further”. He noted the strengths and weaknesses of the programme that we had set up and suggested a lot of practical ideas to supplement what we were already doing. His experience in working with the ladies was so very good, and we saw the self confidence and joy of the ladies as they “brainstormed” together preparing their futures. Some of the women have elected to return to their place of birth, which we think is a good idea since family circles will be there to support them, especially as most of them now have not only a skill but also money saved in the bank.



At the end of the seminar we had the “graduation” of five of the first Tamara women who have now completed their time of training and are ready to work on their own. For the time being we shall continue to help them to sell the artifacts, in fact we have been thinking of trying to find a way to sell them abroad in a more official way... If anyone has any ideas about this, they would be more than welcome. Some of the Tamara ladies have hopes of starting little shops, one of them has the idea to be a broker for farmers and the local market since her family has been involved in that type of work. A new generation of Tamara women have begun their training, and since the seminar we note a new spirit among them, new hopes and new desires.

On another and more somber note I would like to share with you an experience I had this evening....

The hospital had informed us a few weeks ago, of a lady, Fatuma, who is HIV and in her last trimester of pregnancy, alone, and with no one to help her. We washed her and changed her sheets and clothing, and basically, cheered her up. The bath and change of clothes worked magic on her and we were able to leave her with a smile on her face and at peace with the world.

Being so few, and realizing her need of frequent visits, we asked one of our Tamara Women to take on Fatuma, and to prepare food for her, and make sure her clothes were changed and washed; whilst we pay her for this little duty, we know that Hindia is a person who has the real gift for taking care of others.

Today on my way back to the town from bringing the workers, I met Hindia, who told me that Fatuma was being really uncooperative and was throwing away the food that she brought her each day!

We went to the hospital together and I was horrified to find Fatuma like a living skeleton, sitting on her bed in a horrible mood. She was in no mood to have visitors, and it took time to get her to listen to us and to tell us what she wanted to drink. I took the opportunity to explain again that Hindia was my “other self” and that she came when I could not and so Fatuma should treat her well etc....

Her pregnancy is hardly visible, in the eighth month; no one would know that she was carrying a child. Her poor, wizened face peeped out from under the sheets, and her eyes and teeth took up a disproportionate amount of space.

As she looked at me, or rather into my eyes, she seemed to be questioning as to whether she was worth the effort of trying to keep her alive. Fatuma gave me the impression of having lost interest in our world, although equally, she looked to be annoyed that she was ignored by everyone, lost in a bed at the end of the ward.

I went to look for the nurse, and to find the file to know what the doctors had decided.... After a lot of searching her file was nowhere to be found as she was “discharged”! Obviously still occupying a hospital bed, she was technically not there... The pain of her anonymity hurt me; Fatuma was hanging on to life (both she

and her unborn child) by the skin of her teeth, and yet, officially both were written off!

Because she had no family, she could not complain, ask questions, make suggestions, but as I discovered, the Lord had his own helpers there in the hospital, in the persons of two young, newly qualified doctors who made themselves available (even though they were not on duty) and accepted to return to the hospital from the town to answer my questions and queries and to set up a plan of action for her.

I was impressed by the way these two young men spoke to her, with both respect and interest. I left her in their good hands, promising that she would have a visit from Fr Christopher in the morning....

Please pray for Fatuma and her baby, it will be a miracle if the baby survives... but then miracles do happen! Like the little baby that Fr Christopher took to hospital today with severe dehydration, from the refugee camp, just that little extra step and a life is saved!



There are more than 170 children packed (literally) into the two classrooms! when I go to the camp I see children scurrying off to school with now, tatty exercise books in their hands and pencils sticking out from between the pages. It is a joy to see and we hope to be able to be more present in the camp in the coming months, when we shall have some volunteers with us.



With the ordination of our new Bishop, last Sunday in Dire Dawa, we hope for the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit to lead us in the ways of First Evangelization that people may know the Good News that they are loved as beloved sons and daughters of the father!

Thank you again, for all your prayer for the mission, and for the donations that you send to us.

In Jesus,

M Joachim