

December 6, 2006
Ranchi

Dear Sisters and Friends,

Here we are in Ranchi after so many "missionary send offs." Four days have passed since our arrival and it feels as though much time has passed. How many things in just a few days!



We left Rome with an hour of delay and we arrived in Kuwait at 8:50 p.m. (local time) and in Italy it was 6:50 p.m. It was a good flight with excellent service. The wait in Kuwait was not long since we boarded at 8:45 p.m. towards Delhi. The airport is new, elegant, clean and modern....

At 4:40 a.m. (local time) on December 2 (in Italy it was around midnight), we landed at the Delhi airport. There we had to collect our baggage and change airports.

With all our heavy and cumbersome baggage we took a bus that took us to the domestic airport. Persons and baggage were inside the bus. An angel of mercy helped us to load and unload the suitcases. From the beginning, as you see, we have encountered good angels in our path!

We were afraid to have problems with our over the limit baggage because on national flights they allow only 20 kilos and on international flights 30 kilos. But there was no problem. The check in luggage arrived safely in Ranchi where we arrived with a bit of a delay. In Delhi, we had to wait several hours before boarding which was around 11 a.m.

Before claiming our luggage, in the midst of huge amount of people, we saw a hand greeting us. It was Sr. Laura Leming, our Sister from the United States, who came from Bangalore to Ranchi specifically to welcome us. How exciting! During three months she had taught classes to the Scholastics. She returns to the United States on December 12. With her were two Brothers who offered us flowers: a bouquet for each one, that is, one for Sr. Teresa, one for Sr. Marie Joëlle, and one for me. These are a signs of welcome to the Marianist Sisters of Ranchi.



They accompanied us to our new residence. The house of the Ursuline Sisters who gave us a marvelous welcome. A very symbolic welcome as they know how to do in India: at the entrance the Sisters all gathered, they illuminated a heart made of flowers which they had designed on the floor and they brought a jar with water and they washed our hands. Then, to the rhythm of the songs and tambourines, they accompanied us to the dining room where we were served as honored guests.

Later, we arrived to our new residence, what can we tell you?

Perhaps it is a five star accommodation with two small tables, a small closet with shelves, and a bed with a mosquito net (indispensable of course). There is a stand to hang our clothes because it cannot be done in the closet. There is a bucket and a basin for washing yourself and for washing clothes. The sink and the toilets are in common and are located outside. The Korean Sisters arrived the next day and they certainly appreciated the bed since they are accustomed to sleeping without a mattress. Sr. Teresa and I were less appreciative. The first few nights I thought often of St. Lawrence on its grill to encourage myself, since no doubt he was worse than me.

The next morning still sleepy, Sr. Teresa and I met each other and one look was sufficient to guess what our first night had been like for the two of us. We smiled and ... we moved on because our day was beginning!

At this moment the cold weather could be felt. During the morning it is cold and also at the end of the day and during the night. The two blankets given to us were not enough and we asked for a third one. However, during the day it is warm outside. December and January are the coldest. For the four of us, it is an ideal weather. We feel good and the climate is very good even if very dry.



The first days have been days of meetings, visits, and getting to know others. We have greeted different religious communities, Cardinal Toppo, and our Brothers who always welcome us in a very special way.

On Sunday, December 3, I did not know neither what Gospel nor what readings were read to us. Since it was the first Sunday of Advent I had a certain recollection of what they were but did not find it very helpful. I had left the booklet in Italian and our first Mass was in HINDI. The Cathedral, just in front of our house, was filled with people of many colors. Young people in great numbers, very great numbers above all young women...

Our day begins at 5 a.m. but beginning, next week we will be getting up at 4:30 a.m. We will start studying English at "Loyola Center." We pray with the Ursuline Sisters and we eat with them. The other things we are organizing little by little.

The meals are good and we are gradually getting used to the food, because the Sisters are very attentive and prepare the meals in a way that it does not have too much hot sauce for us as it has for them.

Ranchi is a city of about three million inhabitants, at least according to the census, but it looks like there are many more. The city is changing rapidly and the problems increase because many leave their villages in order to come to the city to find work. The streets are packed with people. It is impossible to imagine the spectacle offered to the eyes when you walk in the streets in the center of the city. It is an extraordinary collection of persons of all colors, animals, pigs, bicycles, "rickshaws" that try to weave in and out, a deafening noise and an impressive disorder. It is difficult to explain.



People are very gracious, simple, welcoming and with a smile. They greet you easily and their smile is very welcoming...

It is also true that some look at you more seriously; all are not Christians but the major part greet you affectionately.



December 7

Yesterday was the feast of St. Nicolas "Santa Claus" is very famous here like in England and the United States. In the community of the Ursuline Sisters a climate of celebration reigned. In the evening, there was a community gathering of a joyous fiesta. St. Nicolas came to our gathering, bringing gifts for all. Also for us: a mandarin, some peanuts, a small ironware bowl useful for when going to the villages or other outing. It was a very pleasant gathering.



This morning we went to the community of the novitiate of the Ursuline Sisters and we participated in the celebration of 10 First Professions and 2 Perpetual Professions. All the celebration was in HINDI which was long but beautiful with many flowers and colors.



In the afternoon we visited the Gyan Deep Community of our Brothers, which is very near our house. It is this community that is responsible for the REDS centers of which you have already heard us speak and where we have the intention of collaborating with.



Tomorrow they are waiting for us at the novitiate. There, we will celebrate our patronal feast and we will renew our vows.

It is a week heavy with many things but it is important to discover the reality in which we find ourselves. I stop now...

We keep you all in our thoughts and prayers. We know that all of you accompany us. Thank you for demonstrating your affection and support. Merry Christmas! May Christ continue to grow in all of us and make us more capable to dialogue and the welcome each other.

Sr. M. Franca Zonta

Here I continue that text initiated by Sr. Franca.

On December 8 we began with the Eucharist at 5:45 a.m. during which 33 Ursuline Sisters and a Salesian student sister renewed their vows. A beautiful celebration...

We were invited to eat at the small community of the "Camilian" Sisters who also started their mission in the community of the Ursulines and now, they have been living in a rented a house for 7 months. Having studied in Italy, they prepared an Italian dinner for us. A wonderful welcome....



In the afternoon, a Brother from the novitiate came for us and we had Indian tea with the Sisters of the Generalate of the Congregation of St. Anne. There are located next door to our Brothers and they wanted to host our Sisters, but they speak only in Hindi!

From there we took off to the novitiate. As soon as they heard the car motor, the gate opened and the novices welcomed us with flowers, songs, tambourines, and dances until we reach the community room. There we had the usual washing of the hands and a few words of welcome. Then we had the Celebration of the Eucharist Indian style that was precious, prayerful and with a marvelous homily given by our Sister Laura Leming. At supper each one of us sat at a different table in order to talk with the novices (18) who had so many questions. Later the fiesta continued. Each Office prepared a dance. All concluded with cakes and fruit juice.



We had a restful night and after participating in the Eucharist we got on the road towards Binda among villages of the "India jungle" where Father Santosh is waiting for us in the lovely community. With him we go to the school where the children welcome us.



How marvelous! Four years ago there were only 60 registered children, and now there are almost 400! The Brothers have built two new classrooms, they have covered a paved area and the little church has been converted into classrooms. On Sundays it is still utilized as a church. As the students were taking exams we did not bother them very long. Father Santosh accompanied us to the parish that serves 26 villages.



After lunch with the Brothers, we played tourists and went to see the Waterfalls of Hirni.

Second Sunday of Advent: a more peaceful day where each one of us does what she has to do e.g. watch, write letters, or reflection. In the afternoon we had a good community meeting before Adoration at the cathedral. The next day, Sr. Laura Leming came over to eat with us and a Brother from the novitiate came for me. With much sentiment we hugged each other and I left our four founders to continue the work that God has begun showering us with so many blessings.

All and each one counts on our prayer and our loving presence. The Congregation has called them and they have responded. May Mary accompany them joined with our Founders. The Marianist Family is growing...Let us give thanks to God for so many marvelous blessings.

I am grateful to you for having been in close proximity to us, so interested to this long-awaited Foundation. I am also grateful to all the different branches of the Marianist Family and so many friends and family members who support us. United in the same prayer and the same mission, I embrace you.

Sr. Marie Joëlle

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