

Br. Daniele and Mr. Lino

(This summer two young American Assumptionists, Brothers Daniele and Brian, are spending time working at our new mission in Orizaba, Mexico, in the state of Veracruz. Recently they reflected on their experience. Here are some excerpts….)

from Br. Daniele Caglioni

I really do feel at home here. The concept of time, the pace of life, are SO different than they are back home. It has helped me in my desire to not be so perfectionistic.

Honestly, I'm starting to discern whether I can return here for my diaconate year. I know that this seems like a lightning bolt, and that's why I'm only saying "discern" for now, but... the family

spirit, the simplicity of the people, their acknowledgment of God's centrality in their lives, this has really grown my desire to work with the poor. Before I left, Fr. Simon asked where I would like to be assigned in my first assignment after priesthood, and I said, "I want to work with the poor, mon pére." My experience in the Philippines was so life-changing. I treasure the opportunity to live in the midst of simplicity. The souls of these brothers and sisters here are like clear mirrors. You can sense their feelings, their thirst for God, their struggles, and joys. Being here has really strengthened my knowledge of my own charism: I am meant to be with people.

But I know what's most important is GOD'S will for me, not my own. So that's why I've chosen to frame this as "further discernment."

I am especially thankful to P. Oswaldo for assigning us as "pastors" of one of our chapels. I am especially thankful for the trust he has shown in me, telling me to "jump in" to the deep, a new experience. Brian is assigned to Jalapia, I am assigned to San Andres. Since we don't have enough priests to cover all our chapels every day, Brian and I have been tasked with celebrating week-day Services of the Word, including giving a brief homily. I mention gratitude in this experience because on the 29th of June, I was asked to go celebrate a Service of the Word at the house of a parishioner who is part of one of our Bible Study groups. This involved exposing the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration, celebrating the Service of the Word, AND blessing the parishioner's house (all the rooms, appliances, etc.) with holy water.

My period of Adoration that day was probably one of the most important moments of formation I've had since entering the Assumptionists. As I knelt before the Lord, the gravity of what I was doing, and what I would be fully celebrating soon, dawned on me. I realized that the priesthood is as much a mental exercise as it is physical. Let me explain: A successful priesthood does not rest on how many chapels I build or on how many student groups I lead. In the priesthood, at the altar and with the people, we are speaking GOD'S words, not our own. I realized that in order to really enter into what I was about do for the people that day, I would have to empty myself of myself, "get out of God's way," so to speak. Success in ministry, lies in "getting out of the way," letting God work through you. We are witnessing to God's life, the life He wants to share with us. Ironically, the day before, the 28th of June, I had a really tough evening at San Andres, where I struggled with some Spanish words, and I felt that the people weren't understanding what I was saying, not getting my message. I felt very humiliated.

But maybe that's the point of failure. In failure, we realize that we are empty vessels. Without God, we can do nothing. WHAT we do, in fact, is not ours at all. It is God's work. In failure, God is cleaning us out of anything of ourselves, things we cling to, so that He can work.

This trust in the Divine Mercy of Jesus is especially important here where things aren't as "planned" and "scheduled" as they are in the States. I'm really enjoying what the Mexican "mañana" frame of mind is doing to my perfectionism. People here live in the moment, for the present. They aren't tied to a time-table. They go with the flow, and this has helped me be more open to God's providence and mercy and, as a result, less perfectionistic.

from Br. Brian Verzella

I arrived in Mexico City on June 16th, and spent a wonderful week exploring its many churches, museums, parks, and even getting in a couple of games of soccer! I've been in Orizaba now for 2 weeks. As you know, the area is full of natural beauty, and the people are very warm and welcoming.

Twice now I've had to change my running route ….and now, I must run straight up a mountain! It's not ideal, but it sure is pretty. One day while in a remote area (Fr. Oswaldo was saying Mass, and I was strolling the immediate vicinity), I snapped a few pictures of the mountains, all the while keeping as low a profile as possible for a Gringo in these parts. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a man staring at me with obvious suspicion. Ten minutes later, a truckload of 4 or 5 policemen wielding machine guns descended upon me for an impromptu "interrogation." In truth, they were very nice....it seems an "overzealous" local called to report the 'gringo.'

I have been teaching 2 English classes (one for kids, one for adults) Monday through Friday. It's been a blast, but it involves a lot of work developing lesson plans from scratch. Also, I've been "celebrating" the Mass (actually, a service of the Word, no consecration of course) for the past 2 weeks in a nearby parish. It was certainly a trial by fire initially, but I really think I've got the hang of it now. This, too, is a lot of work, as I have to meticulously review the readings, prayers, and homily to ensure a thorough grasp of the content.