

FR. MORAND KLEIBER, AA - professor, philosopher, and still a missionary at 88

(editor's note: Fr. Morand came to the United States in the early 80s to take refresher courses in philosophy at Boston University. He currently lives at the Assumptionist retirement community in Albertville, France, in the foothills of the Alps and site of the 1992 Winter Olympics.)

Many ask themselves what impression one might have at arriving in retirement in the Albertville residence. I can give an answer in complete simplicity and truth, after four months at the residence. I believe that it depends on the previous life of each person: the experiences he might have had in his life of ministry, his health, or difficulties he might have to face, and of course the deepening of his religious life. As for me, I was marked by a long period of teaching philosophy at the scholasticate, then by responsibilities in the provincial community, and finally by 22 years of mission in Africa (the Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Zaire).

In arriving in Albertville from Lorgues, I found a great house with many elderly people (50 lay and 28 religious), and more health workers and administrators. In the main, my life is divided in two: the times of daily religious prayer, marked by the Eucharist, the divine office (often sung), and community meals; and the personal time given to each person for his personal or community interests that can be varied.

For me it is extremely simple. The free time is taken by my ties to the Congolese south of the equator: the diocese of Beni-Butembo, mostly evangelized by the Belgian and Dutch Assumptionists since 1929. Today there are 1,800,000 inhabitants; three quarters of them are practicing Catholics. Since 1983 I have witnessed the Rwanda genocide of 1994, and the two wars of liberation: 1996 and 1998. I saw thousands of deaths, widows and orphans and I will never be able to forget them. I still see the eyes of Christ and his question: “Do you love me? Can you help me?” (The population still lives in misery.)

During my vacations, I contacted benefactors in France and with their gifts created two centers: one for orphans where since 2004, 900 learn a trade, and it also pays for the schooling of 860 others. The other center is for diabetics where thousands have been treated since 2002. Because of that, I must stay in contact with benefactors, those in charge, and the Congolese, with the 260 Congolese Assumptionists already formed and missionaries all over the world. That is a lot to keep me busy, and I am learning to work with the Internet for there is no mail service there.The other point is to support the people like me afflicted with ringing in the ears, (very strong in me 24/7) contracted south of the equator on the occasion of a possibly fatal malaria, treated with a perfusion of five liters of quinine that saved my life and jumbled my ears.

And that is my life! I do not wish to die yet, at 88, for I cannot abandon all those who are suffering there. So I spend my time supporting the people with ringing in the ears and saving lives (by the hundreds). That has meaning and it is a way to be happy. I am in the Congo by thought, heart and action for most of my time.

I could quote the words of Saint Paul to Timothy: “Our Savior Christ Jesus manifested himself by destroying death and made life resplendent; that is the Gospel for which I was made a messenger, apostle and teacher. It is for that reason that I must suffer yet (a little), but I do not regret, because I know in whom I have placed my faith”. You might prefer the testimony of a healed Congolese person: “Father Morand Kleiber is a holy man, a blessing from God, and a protector of the diabetics of Butembo.”

Fr. Morand Kleiber

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