

My Experience of Being an Authentic SSND

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In 1951, the São Paulo provincial council received a request from the Bishop of Palmas (southeast of Paraná in southern Brazil) to reach out to a village called Marrecas. There, immigrants from Santa Catarina and Rio Grande had settled in a few simple houses spread in the midst of pine trees. As descendants of the former European immigrants (Germans, Italians, Poles, etc.), they had settled in the south at the beginning of the 20th century, seeking a better future for their families.

The bishop asked the SSNDs to open a school to teach the immigrant children, to give spiritual assistance, and to attend to their needs when—because of the great distances between villages—no priest would be available. Faced with these urgent needs, it was impossible to refuse this call that matched our charism so well. So, in the spirit of Mother Theresa and with missionary zeal, the São Paulo province decided that three sisters would start this mission in January of 1952.

I had dreamed of being a missionary among the indigenous people in the Amazon. Because I was too young and not prepared, the superior said no to my request. Our plans are not God's plan!

Later, however, on Palm Sunday, I received a call to pack and prepare to go to Marrecas the next day. At that time, the means of transportation and roads were not as good as those we have today. Despite all that, I reached my destination on Holy Saturday night. Everything was strange to me—no electricity, water only from a well, and very simple meals. The people were arriving, eager for the Holy Saturday celebration. Very curious, they gathered around Sister Illuminata Singer in the light of a kerosene lantern to practice hymns for the celebration. I had a mixture of feelings. Despite the poverty and simplicity, I was happy. Another world was opening before me. What a happy and holy night!

Easter Sunday! Nature proclaimed Jesus' Resurrection! Just after morning Mass, Sister Illuminata assigned a group of children to me for catechism, with neither a room nor even a space available. Looking around, I saw a clearing with many tree trunks. Quickly the children sat down and looked at me with curiosity. Facing this scene, I realized that my dream was just beginning. What would Mother Theresa say? "Content with little, we go out into the whole world, into the tiniest villages, into the poorest dwellings, wherever the Lord call us. . . to bring the Good News of God's Kingdom." (MT144)

The village reflected poverty. A hundred children had no rooms or furniture, but the interest of the families and our joy to be in a community full of love, prayer, and zeal for mission made us strong, happy, and able to overcome the difficulties.

We were poor with the poor people From them we learned to share, not only our lives—our knowledge, time, and affection—but also our material things. “Through our ministry, we and those to whom we are sent are mutually enriched.” (YAS, C 25)

I choose to share this experience from Marrecas because it shaped my life as a young sister in the steps of Mother Theresa. Poverty and joy made us one heart and one soul in community and became the basis for the future of my religious life.

Today I feel that God strengthens me to meet the challenges that come into my life, especially to face and accept serenely the limitations of aging and to reflect my gratitude to God and to the Congregation.