

Potoichan 2018

I made my 5th trip to Potoichan with a group of fellow lay believers. Like others, I ponder about the source of the mysterious power that brought these Sisters to this foreign land. Maybe that is the same source that also brings me back to this village repeatedly. Deep in the mountains of Southern Mexico, the Sisters decided to put down their roots here, fully trusting in the source that called them here. At first glance, it seems obvious that the missionary Sisters are supposed to go out into the far reaches of this world to deliver the message of the Good News to those who are otherwise deprived of it. But to answer the call with the purity of heart that erases all doubt and fully embody the mystery of His presence instills in me a sense of awe. I contemplate on the power of the spirit that moved their hearts. Perhaps it's the same spirit that moved the heart of the boy who offered 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread to Jesus.

I met Sister Pedro Ham during my teenage years at St Cecilia parish in Carson, California. Unexpectedly, our paths crossed 30 years later at St Raphael in Norwalk, California. Her invitation to Potoichan came soon after I and a couple of other lay believers formed a nonprofit organization called Bridge of Mission International (BMI) in order to invite others to participate in mission trips. The Sisters have been very gracious in inviting BMI to their village and this was my 5th trip to Potoichan. Our main focus has always been medical and dental service at the village clinic run by the Sisters. This time we were blessed with few helping hands that set up dental chairs, making it easy for us to offer dental services. The compressor, vacuum, water and air lines and electric work were put in and lessened the burden on the dental team, negating the need for bringing heavy portable units. The dental set up worked beautifully, comparable to the dental offices in US, almost. We performed extractions, cavity fillings, nerve treatments and teeth cleaning with scaler. We used portable x-ray and sterilization unit to ensure safety of the patients. The oriental doctor of medicine performed acupuncture to treat various physical ailments and I also offered up my medical services to treat everyone who sought help. Through out almost 5 days, we collectively treated over 500 patients. We tried our best with what we had. We hoped and prayed that our treatments will do no harm and that they will find some relief in their discomfort, even a little.

Treating these patients have always given me a sense of purpose. Giving them even a small sense of relief made it worthwhile. In the grand scheme of the lives of people in Potoichan, we played such a small role and will likely occupy even smaller portion of their memory. Some medication for their ailing knees or extracting a tooth that has seen its better days or providing pain relief with acupuncture- all these modalities gave some short lived relief. Maybe they will remember us. Maybe they will recognize us when we return. Then, they will come back and see us again and receive similar treatments all over again. We, on the other hand, will definitely remember. Our experience will forever be etched in the deep recesses of our memory. Some of us may find profound change within ourselves, some will have felt less. But all of us, now or later, will have received. God's touch will never go wasted. He has touched us through the lives of the people of Potoichan. Through giving, we have received so much more. What we gave was measurable, but what we received, immeasurable. We gave treatments that were valuable, but we received the joy of service that was invaluable. The living out of our Christian faith, sharing the love of Christ with the people of Potoichan, finding that common thread between us

that is Christ and His Church- these are gifts that can never be received without us being there. These are the gifts that would never be recognized if we didn't take the first step towards this foreign but familiar land.

All of this, all the gifts that we received, would not be possible without a foundation. Of course, Jesus established this foundation but the Sisters built on that foundation and made it tangible. The Sisters made it possible for us to be in Potoichan. The Sisters created an environment where we were welcomed by the residents of Potoichan. The Sisters recognized the value of their presence in this town. They saw it 15 years ago and lived out their calling from God. I ponder on their heart 15 years ago. God so moved their hearts collectively and, in turn, they trusted in Him completely. Maybe they hesitated, found it to be humanly silly- to go and live somewhere so foreign. Maybe they couldn't grasp the coming difficulties 15 years ago, maybe they were naïve. But I can only imagine that they trusted Him completely. The boy who gave up his small meal in front of 5000 men must have been very naïve. Maybe his mother and father pulled on his clothes to have him sit down. Maybe Jesus gave him a wink. But I imagine that the boy trusted in Jesus, without all the human calculations and exclusions. He trusted Him completely. It's hard to imagine the heart of that boy. I believe it's only possible with a divine touch or a wink. It must have happened with the Sisters as well. How else would they decide to go there- to such a completely different land with an alien culture and language, not for a year or two but to live there and bury their bones there? I am in awe. More I return, more I am in awe. I am in awe of the Spirit that moved them. Christ's spirit is alive, well and thriving. This is our God. This is who we serve and who loves us. There is nothing we couldn't do. The road to Potoichan can be difficult but the Sisters have made it, well, worth traveling. Come and see.