

# SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART PROVINCE OF INDIA NEWSLETTER



12<sup>th</sup> April 2022

## NEWSLETTER FROM THE RISHIKESH COMMUNITY

### My Journey with the Flowers

Everyone loves flowers. We admire them and enjoy being with flowers. We too are the flowers of God's garden. When I do gardening I feel these flowers have no tongue but they speak a lot with their presence. When I came to Rishikesh, we didn't have many people whom we knew, but this place still communicates with us a lot. Recently some Jesuit brothers had visited our place; they said, 'You have the house in the best place'. I do agree with them. We don't benefit much from flowers, except that they give us much joy. In the same way, though we don't benefit much from this house here materially, but we get a feeling here of being in the palm of the LORD, of being in the presence of God. Down below we have the river, 'mother' Ganga, and above 'father' Himalayas. We live between these beautiful creations of God; we can say that we live between mother and father, safe and protected.



All this came to my mind while I was working in garden. I learn many things from these flowers, which by their speechless presence represent God in His stillness. I still remember what Sr. Shanti told me "Vandana Mataji used to say (*I can't quote the exact words but what I understood is*), your presence is not you, but you are representing Christ here". We are the flowers of God's garden. We may not speak, but our presence must bring Christ and joy to others.

Whenever I go out, I always look at the pilgrims. They come in groups with a lot of devotion to meet God. Still your journey is yours alone. You are ultimately responsible for the direction of your journey, the journey of your life. This I learnt from flowers. You may go in a group to look for God, but God meets us individually. 'Abide in me and I will abide in you.' I grew a variety of flowers in our garden, but they present themselves as individuals. They are unique.

I experience positivity in the garden. I felt the same among people here. I don't know them; but they give the positive feeling of God's existence. These flowers have a very good relationship with the weather. I don't know how they communicate, but they know to adjust and live with each other. I feel it happens because they know the gardener will protect them. Their trust is a challenging lesson for me.

Here I saw old and young all come to meet God, trusting that God will protect them. Do I have same trust in God who is my creator Gardener? Do I have courage to be clay in the potter's hand allow Him to mould? I realise that my likes and dislike come as hindrances.

Bloom wherever you are planted. This is another lesson I learn from these flowers. I planted them according to my choice, but they grew happily and gave me satisfaction. Here is my God my father who has planted me. How much satisfaction do I give Him with my life and doing His will? Do I bloom wherever my provincial sends me? This made me reflect on my call and trust in my Lord and in my provincial who planted me in different places.

In the end I know these flowers will go to the feet of the Lord. I too feel my ultimate end is in the arms of my Lord. Rishikesh has become a garden of God for me. Many people come here with different intentions but my focus goes to those who come to be with Lord, to seek God in their lives. I am happy. I got to learn many things from flower. Each thing that God created teaches us to be like Jesus, Human and Divine. Are we ready to learn with open heart and mind?

*Josephine Pereira rscj*

### **Our visit to eight institutions of the Bijnor Diocese**

“Let the little children come to me because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.” (Mt.19:13-15)

Jesus loved all people, especially children, very much. It was indeed God's plan and a golden opportunity for me and for all us through these visits to reach out in love to people especially children with multiple disabilities. The Society's charism asks us to reach out in love to all. I was very happy to have this wonderful experience.

We have been staying in this diocese for many months. We were very eager to know more about it and to see two-three mission stations, especially those that had a little different type of ministry. Fr. Joseph, who is in charge of the minor seminarians who are here at the theologate, offered to take us to visit some of the mission stations of the diocese because Sr. Vimala had taken Spoken English classes for them while we were away for our community experience.

On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2022 from 5.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. we spent our whole day in visits. We thought it would be only to two places, but by God's grace and Fr. Joseph's generosity, we visited eight institutions. It was a very wonderful, inspiring and heart-touching experience. For me, it was an eye-opening event in my life.

Our first visit was to Prem Dham. We saw children with multiple disabilities (physical and mental), all boys. As soon as they saw us, they approached us because they were very excited to meet us. Here I remembered the sayings of St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata. “Smile with love” and “Charity begins at home”. We smiled at them and they too smiled back at us. We then attended their Syro-Malabar Rite Mass in Hindi. The whole mass was in chanting. We admired their melodious singing and music, reading and responses. It was very amazing. Everything was done by these boys, big and small. I felt very happy and had a grace-filled experience. Also during Holy Mass we were amused, as well as inspired, to see that they were helping or correcting each other gently much of the time – to join their hands, to stand up or to sit down, to clap, to sing, to keep silence, to go out etc. However, there were no quarrels or disagreements among them because of this. After mass, we went round and visited some more children, those who were completely bed-ridden. We touched them and smiled at them. Our presence gave great joy to them and me too. It was an opportunity to see God in these children. The children were very cute, loving, cheerful, innocent and affectionate. Meeting these children made a great impact on my life. I still remember their beautiful and cheerful bright smiling faces.

Then we visited a huge campus of the diocese, where there were four institutions and the church. We saw fathers and many sisters from different congregations, who are running the institutions. There was one only for girls with multiple disabilities (physical and mental) also there was an institution for children who are deaf and dumb, both girls and boys. When they met us there was great joy on their faces. It was very wonderful. Fr. Joseph was very free with them. He spoke to them in sign

language. They tried to speak with us but we could not understand them. So Fr. Joseph and the sisters explained to us. Children from all the four institutions, who are able to do so, go to a large school on the same campus. The teachers teach in the ordinary way as well as by sign language! So even the children with only physical disabilities get to know the sign language!

For me it was very sad and painful to hear that these children were neglected and abandoned by their parents because they are disabled. The fathers and sisters along with their staff are taking very good care of these children, with so much of love. All the children too, looked happy. It was indeed a very good experience just to be with them, to enjoy their company and to reach out with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus towards them.

We also visited St. Mary's Church, the Holy Family Hospital and a school run by Holy Family sisters. At the CMI provincial house we were very fortunate to meet Bishop Gratian (now retired) who had welcomed Vandana Mataji and Ishpriya Mataji in this diocese. While visiting all these places we could experience the family spirit in this diocese, where Fr. Joseph felt so free not only to take us into all these institutions and parishes, but also to arrange lunch and tea for us in 2 of these. We appreciated Fr. Joseph, who was like a St. Joseph, taking care of us. We thanked him for his generosity in giving a whole day for us and for driving us to all these places. It was a very enlightening, enriching and memorable experience for all of us. I thanked God the father Almighty for His goodness.



At the institution for children who are deaf and dumb

*Savita Gamjaya*

### **“God sees and God provides”**

From each experience one learns something, whatever the situation or circumstances might be, but it always teaches one to carry something for the future.

As a south Indian and coming from a traditional, Catholic, city background, Rishikesh gave me a cultural shock. When I first came here I started noticing all the unfamiliar sights and I was really lost. I started asking questions in my mind about everything. Why it is like this, and why it is like that? - The saffron colour, the language, the religion, the culture and the place itself gave me different kind of feelings. I was totally lost until I found the answer to many of these questions. That has helped me to open my eyes. I got new insights through my formation and by visiting the places here as well.

When Sr. Vimala's sister, Tessie, had come here to Rishikesh for a short visit, she offered to take us to Haridwar and we went with her. After coming back, Sr. Vimala asked us to write our experience looking at it as though Jesus had accompanied us and through His eyes. This is what I experienced through the eyes of my Jesus. It gave me a new perspective. This is what I imagined:

When Jesus heard that we were going to Haridwar, immediately He started reflecting about it, spending his time with His Father. Before the journey began he spent one hour of prayer, with His Father, in the chapel. As we were going towards the vehicle Jesus was in deep contemplation. Then we sat inside the vehicle and the journey began. During our journey I was looking at the brands and the number plates of each of the cars as it passed. He was looking at the people and reflecting about them. Then I told Him, "Why do you always reflect about everything? You could spend your time enjoying your journey!" He answered me, "My dear child, you like one saying, 'Don't judge a book by its cover'. This saying is very deep. Unless we become one WITH the culture of the place we are in and go below the surface, we will be like the Pharisees and Sadducees, just looking at the outside cover. So come and join me, to see the inside beauty of the Hindu culture in Haridwar."

As we reached the foot of the very high hill on which the Chandi Devi Mandir is situated, Jesus was observing all the pilgrims. As Tessie went to buy the ticket for the ropeway, He slowly turned his eyes towards Tessie and was looking at her with tender love and appreciation, thinking of her love for our community. As we started going inside the cabin of the ropeway we were very excited, but Jesus was looking at the beauty of the valley over which we were going, appreciating the creation of His Father. When we reached the temple He reflected that even in this time of the pandemic, the faith of the people has not gone down. Then He said to me, "When the base is strong, the building will be really firm to stand like these believers."

Inside the temple people were tying small pieces of red silk material as offerings for their intentions. Looking at them Jesus was moved with pity for them and started praying for them and gave them the hope that very soon everything will be alright. However, He was angry with the authorities of the temple who had thrown down all the previously offered silk scarves like so much garbage, down the hillside. They were not only showing disrespect for the sentiments and offering of the devotees, but also spoiling His Father's creation.



Then we moved down from this place to another place, to the ghats, to see the Ganga Arathi. We were not sure where we could sit and see the Arathi well. Our driver, after parking the taxi, looked for us and came towards us. When Jesus saw this he was very grateful and expressed his gratitude to this man.

As Jesus was sitting with me, he was focusing on the crowd and saying to himself, "Look at their faith! They have come so far just because of their conviction and total trust in God." He saw that people were washing all their sins in the Ganga river; He was amazed because it was just as it had happened in His time, in the Jordan.

Before the Arathi began, some of the staff of the temple came around collecting donations from those who had intentions to offer at the Arathi, and giving a receipt for it. When the Ganga Arathi started, Jesus was steadily looking at everyone and praying for them as well. When the Arathi got over we were heading out and so many held out Arathi plates for people to take a blessing. Then Savita and I went to put our feet in the Ganga. He was looking at us and smiling.

After that we went to the vehicle and on the way back also Jesus was in deep contemplation. When we reached our destination He thanked the driver. When we came back to Jeevandhara, Jesus went straight to the chapel where He spent some time with His Father, reflecting about this whole experience. It was a wonderful learning experience for me to journey along with my Jesus.

*Nithya Raj*



## Locked down by the Lord!

Transferred to the ashram? Does one get a *transfer* to an ashram? Not my choice! Well! – hadn't I said, "For better or for worse..." though not quite in those words, in 1971? So here I was! Far from the noise & bustle of Torpa and the children, the staff, the parents....in Jeevandhara at Rishikesh, in lockdown, with no ministry, no one I knew, and in lockdown & as mataji, no possibility of going around to make acquaintances either! Also, what a different Tapovan to the one I had seen when in 1979 Srs. Tureeya, Shanti and I had come for the inauguration of Jeevandhara! The small quiet village of small houses, stretches of rice field, the quiet tinkling of temple bells across the Ganga had been replaced by narrow, badly built many storied houses, hotels, restaurants, "Home Stays", shops and the noise of tourists!



I was in isolation (except for our helper) and in silence from 22<sup>nd</sup> April to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021, when at last Josephine joined me! I realized that the Lord was continuing His work for a second year! It was very

well planned by Him! In the book of Hosea, Yahweh had said, "I am going to ...lead her into the desert and speak to her heart". He had started His work on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, when He had arranged for the lockdown to come *BANG* down, exactly on the day I was to leave for Bombay and then for Torpa after my hectic 12 days of visiting in Harigaon. Then followed 5 months of lockdown in Harigaon & 5 months in KP – where He arranged a more intense lockdown by laying me flat on the bed for a whole month with mild fever, sore throat & cold, when I could do nothing, but pray & surrender! Here in Jeevandhara I was alone with the Lord and I could see clearly that He was continuing the work begun in Harigaon, for a second year, of drawing me deeper into relationship with Him. The work continued throughout this year also as He slowly relaxed the lockdown He had arranged personally for me in Jeevandhara.



After 6 ½ weeks of isolation, Josephine joined me, then Savita in mid-August, and in mid-September, Nithya. Sunday mass started in September; the brief visits Sr. Sophie, Sr. Anila and Sr. Pratibha were most welcome! Relationships were built with the parish priest as well as well as with the 2-3 CMI fathers in Samanvaya. Spoken English classes with 5 minor seminarians for around 2 months, while the seekers were away, were another welcome source of human interaction!

In my isolation at the beginning I would listen to the voices of the 5-6 boys from the neighbouring houses, aged perhaps 7 years to 10, as they played in the narrow lane outside Jeevandhara. I often remembered Madeleine Sophie asking that her windows be opened that she may hear the voices of the children. Then one day, fairly early, a timid voice came through the gate, "Mataji, our ball has come into your garden." I seized the opportunity to make friends and allowed them in. *They* too seized the opportunity and swarmed into our garden, which must have seemed like an oasis in their concrete desert, searching for their ball in the most unlikely places! After that the loud cry at the gate, "Mataji, our ball..." came regularly and soon we became friendly with them and through them, with a few of their mothers and the 4 tiny children next door.

"Look, I am doing something new" said Yahweh to Israel, but to me, "Look, I am making *you* do something new." This too, has been going on for the past 2 years during my "personal" lockdown by

the Lord. He gave me a variety of new jobs, with no material at hand. He said, “Draw on your past experience and go forward. I am with you.” Thus followed English classes with the teachers of the English medium primary school of St. Theresa (and later with the brothers in Rishikesh) and study of the 1815 Constitutions with the 4 professed young in Harigaon (I had not even carried my Constitutions), history with Anita Hamsoy (I had never taught history & had done my M.A. in History more than 30 years ago!), being a “householder” in the one and a half months I was alone in Rishikesh with our helper – overseeing the detailed cleaning of the whole house, airing, making pickles and training our helper to make certain dishes (which I had never made before myself! – Google baba helped), the formation of older seekers, with all the input that it entailed. Side by side went painting of parts of the building, overseeing the re-structuring of the terrace room, repairs to electrical works, plumbing, seeing to the fabrication of 8 large steel cupboards for the library and repair of the old wooden cupboards in order to sell them, re-arranging the books in the new cupboards. I had no contacts for these, no knowledge of Rishikesh, no vehicle, and it was lockdown! However, Sr. Tureeya’s telephone diary helped.

Recently, as the whole community was reaching a visitor to her taxi, with all her luggage, the youngest of the boys, thinking that *we* were leaving, said sadly, “Are you leaving? Please don’t go!” Well, we are going in a few weeks’ time. However, the memories of the relationships we have built, the people we know, and of “Pita” Himalayas and “Mata” Ganga will remain with me.



*Vimala Verghese rscj*