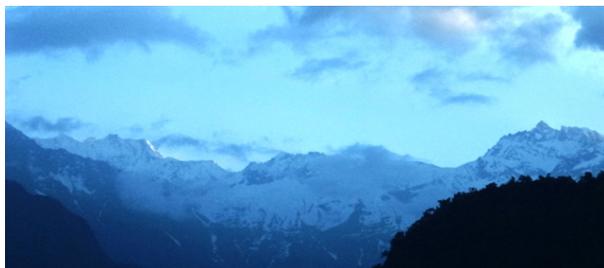


My relief work experiences in Nepal (Tipling village)

When our PCF asked for the volunteers to go to Nepal for relief work, I was little hesitant due to fear and anxiety. But then I opted for this opportunity with faith in God that I will be able to do some good works there. And so Sch. Ronald and I left our Scholastics' summer program on 18 May 2015 and journeyed towards Nepal. As I was travelling to Nepal, my heart was filled with a mixture of emotions and feelings; such as excitement, curiosity, fear, anxiety, doubts on my capacity, etc.

Once we reached Kathmandu, the Nepal Jesuits welcomed us and extended their hospitality to us. On 21 April, we were given an orientation by the NJSI team (Nepal Jesuits Social Institute) about the situation in Nepal after the earthquake. In the meeting it was decided that I would be going to a place called "Tipling" in Dhading district. Now about the place



Tipling: it is a new mission station of the Nepal Jesuits which they revived (Fr. Cap Miller SJ was there long back for his doctoral studies) some years back. There are altogether 547 households. It is surrounded by the Snow Mountains called 'Ganesh Himalayas'. Tipling is not accessible by road. From the town called "Dhading" we travel to the place called "Gangsang" by jeep, which takes about 6 hours or more. There are no proper roads; the vehicle has to travel through the river. From Gangsang we go trekking to Tipling. It takes two days' walk. The walking trails are not safe always, because this locality is known for landslides.

So, I began the journey to Tipling with my other companions Sch. Amos Bage & Sch. Pascal Dhanwar of Jamshedpur province and Sch. Saleow of Kohima region. This was my first time in my life trekking and walking in the mountains as I hail from Chennai. The journey was very difficult and dangerous. Since the path (walking trails) was damaged by the earthquake and landslide, we had to venture into many new paths, which were indeed more dangerous and adventurous. There were moments I had to crawl and proceed. There were some really dangerous places, where a small mistake or a slip of my steps would have ended my life. It was the most difficult time of my life. At this juncture, at times I even felt (during our trekking) that I made a blunder of opting for this relief work. My companions enjoyed their trekking as they already have the experiences of mountains and forests from their childhood. But I was physically weak as we had to walk the whole day, climbing the mountains. But thanks to the Lord, that I was not down in spirit. So I kept on moving. The instruction/suggestion of Fr. Norbert D'Souza, really helped me a lot. He said, "The path is very difficult and dangerous. You look at the cross and



walk across. Never look down or back. Just keep on moving.” The journey was difficult but once I reached the place (Tipling), I felt I was in heaven. Tipling is such a wonderful place.

Tipling is a beautiful place. At the same time I was shocked to see the damaged houses. Not a single house was intact. Every house bore the marks of earthquake; houses in the village are fully or partially destroyed. The house where the Jesuits (Fr. Norbert and Fr. Samuel) were staying had also collapsed. Most of the people were living in the temporary tents. People were trying to lead a normal life, but their faces expressed their anguish, pain and fear. The aftershocks (earthquake) had doubled their fear. There were persons who were thinking it better to leave Tipling. The youth named “Eli” told us that “there is no life possible in Tipling. I would better get down to the plains.” So the life in Tipling is surrounded with fear and uncertainty. Fr. Norbert asked us if we could do something to remove the fear from the hearts of People. And so I prepared and gave some sessions explaining the natural processes of earthquake; explaining to them that it is part of nature and nothing to do with God’s anger or wrath. We explained these to the school children and villagers. I was indeed happy when people said, ‘now we need not fear much about it. Our life will not end now.’ Mean time we tried and put up a temporary shelter for the primary school. As teachers were not present, we contributed our time in taking classes in the school.



People were devastated but not defeated. The village faces destruction and pain but on the other hand, I see the people there as very hardworking and courageous. They are very simple in nature and behavior. They are very hospitable. They are very energetic (especially the students and youth). I see them as people good at heart. As the location of Tipling is wonderful, beautiful and marvelous, so are the people of Tipling. Initially I was little hesitant and worried about my weakness of not knowing Nepali or Tamang language. On the first day I was

bothered about the language, but from the second day I began to communicate in Hindi, which many could partially understand. And I managed to interact with the ‘Catholic Youth Club’, which helped me to mingle with the people. The youth translated things to me and to the people. And people were very receptive of us. They cared for us a lot. They had a high regard and respect for us (Jesuits). Even the army personnel were very appreciative of our works and were very cordial to us. Overall I could say that I did not feel that I was living in a foreign land and speaking foreign language.

In Tipling the normal food of the people is potato and maze. They cultivate these things in their fields. As Tipling does not have any transportation facility, people in the village (most of them) eat boiled potatoes twice a day; morning around 9.00 am and at night. Due to earthquake they had got some rice, oil, salt, etc (relief materials) now. This year, in Tipling, the potato and maze crops were also affected by worms. They were not yielding good crop. There were many days I saw Tipling with only women, elderly persons and children. For many days the youth and able-persons were journeying towards 'Gangsang' or 'Samdang', to bring relief materials. I felt bad to see them busy with collecting relief materials (they have to spend days carrying at least 40 - 60 kgs). This scene reminded me of the days of Joseph & his brothers in Egypt in the Old Testament. So there were many days the Tipling village wore a deserted look without any youngsters around.



Now, when I look back, my stay in Nepal (20th May to 30th June), my heart is filled with gratitude and prayer- a sense of gratitude because it was an opportunity for me to partake in the suffering of the people and to give my service in small ways possible. It was an opportunity for me to grow in putting up with difficult situations. At the same time, my heart is filled with prayer for the suffering people of Nepal and of the world.

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