

2013 CIB Conference Meeting in Brazil

Travel log by Sister Mary John Mananzan, Part One

August 31 to September 9

At last I have some time to write to you after 10 days. Greetings from Rio de Janeiro. But let me start from the beginning. When I left last August 31, I was really a bit reluctant because the Anti-Pork Barrel movement was just gaining momentum. In fact while I was waiting in the airport lounge, I saw on the front page of Standard our picture at the museum, students, myself, the whistleblowers shouting: Abolish Pork Barrel. And in another newspaper I am shown with my mouth wide open and a big piggy right in front of me. Anyway after 26 hours of flight (1 hour to Taiwan, 14 hours to Amsterdam and 11 hours to Sao Paolo) I reached my destination in safety. Sr. Vania and Mother Martha, Lucia, Abbess of a Benedictine Abbey here and co-organizer of the meeting, met me at the airport.

They brought me to our meeting place, the monastery of the Incarnation, which is a Camaldolese convent which is like a double monastery with a community of Camaldolese monks in the Monastery of the Transfiguration just a little up the hill. The nuns are only 5—2 Tanzanians, 2 Brasilians and 1 Brasilian novice who will make profession on Saturday. The Prioress is the Tanzanian, Sr. Christina. It is quite cold here. As you can imagine I slept the whole day the next day. On the third day, we had our Administrative Council meeting. On September 4, we began our conference with 28 Prioresses and Abbesses all over the world including Sr. Rosann Ocken of Peramio. So we are 3 Tutzinger sisters here. With Sr. Vania and me.

We had three inputs on the theme of the next Symposium which is: LISTEN. Sr. Therese Marie of Belgium facilitated the “Listening to the Scriptures”, Sr. Zoe of England facilitated the “Listening to the Holy Rule, and I facilitated the “Listening to Cries of People and the Signs of the Time.” Actually this was every other day. In between, we made visits to monasteries, on the 5th to the first monastery of women established in Brazil, — the Sta. Maria Monastery who has just elected a new Abbess who studied in Paris and when she saw Sr. Mary Placid, she flew down like a bird and swooped Sr. Placid in her arms. According to Abbot Primate, this monastery was in a crisis, languishing with its old, long time Abbess. He is pleasantly surprised how much alive this community is today, because the new Abbess has a real vision which she has managed to convey to her sisters. When she was showing us the garden, she climbed a tree to give us a sample of its cherry-like fruit. Some 50 Brazilian Benedictine Abbesses and Prioresses joined us and we had very lively sharing's with each other explaining 3 pictures of our communities which we were asked to bring to the encounter to begin our conversation.

On September 7, we got up early because we were scheduled to visit two monasteries.

The first one was to Our Lady of Peace monastery in Itapeceria da Serra, which is the convent of Mother Martha Lucia. Their habit was like ours before but with grey veils. They have a very beautiful Church with the Pantocrator in the middle. We had mass and lunch there. There are 29 nuns in the community with many young ones. Then we went to Sao Paulo to the Saint Benedict Monastery of monks. I felt at home when we were entering the city, because there was a rally going on! We saw trucks of police all around and many people in the streets but actually there was more a festive atmosphere than a rally. I asked what the issue was all about: — high prices and corruption!—sounds familiar? I learned that Brazil was actually born in Sao Paulo in a small plateau where there is the first Church of the Jesuit, the Benedictine monastery and college and the Sao Paulo Cathedral. It is too long to tell you the whole history of the city but it is very interesting. After midday prayer and lunch with the monks, we went to visit the Cathedral. In the very big plaza in front of the Cathedral there were people speaking on soap boxes like in Hyde Park. They sounded more like rallyists but most of them are religious fundamentalist or anti-religious fanatics. One was ranting and raving and Sr. Rosann was just passing by when he vented all his ire at her, which she took quite coolly. The Cathedral is enormous the fifth biggest Gothic cathedrals in the world. On our way back to the Benedictine College, we passed by the Jesuit Church which was the first Church in Brazil (1554) it is actually a dwarf compared to the cathedral but has enormous importance. We had a tour of the Benedictine Abbey and the school. The Abbot said he was not sending anyone to Benet but after we met again, later on here in Rio, he said he is thinking of sending the Director of the School, Fr. Dyonisius. They have hundreds of Chinese students, both from old Chinese residents and new Chinese young people coming from China. He said the Chinese Consul is inviting him to open a school in northwest China. So I told him the story of our Mehikou hospital.

Our trip on September 9 was the longest ride we had in Brazil. We started at 6:30 to visit the famous Our Lady of Aparecida Sanctuary, the Patroness of Brazil. It is the biggest shrine in the whole world. It is very well artistically built and the artist Claudio, Pastro actually gave us a tour of the Church explaining all the artistic details. It is bigger than St. Peter's actually. Our Lady's Shrine is at the main altar, of course. But our Lady is very small, only about 12 inches tall, a black Madonna that was found by fishermen who prayed to our lady for a good catch and their prayer was more than answered because they caught Our Lady in their net, too. The Church has two arms at the end of which are the Chapel of Baptism and the Chapel of the Resurrection. This is in addition to the other chapels within the Church like the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, St. Joseph's chapel, etc. There are many interesting art pieces. Of course what interested me is at the end of the Church opposite to the altar there was a bas relief of hundreds of women saints including modern martyrs, the nuns killed in Salvador. By the way the artist is a friend of our Sr. Elisabeth Bussbach, when she was Prioress here in Sorrocaba. She sent him to Germany to visit churches and museums and he said the front piece was inspired by his visit to a German museum. I had a picture with him which I will send to Sr. Elisabeth. I prayed for all of you in front of Our Lady and also during our Mass which was held at a chapel at the back of the image. They said that at night, Our Lady sleeps there,

meaning, they turn the image to the chapel at night and then turn it back to face the church during the day.

We spent the whole morning there and then we went to the Monastery of St. John in a beautiful city which is like a Bavarian town called Campos the Jordao, a tourist city similar but even more beautiful than Baguio. There after midday prayer, we were treated to a sumptuous lunch which we all agreed was like in a 6 Star hotel—barbecue of good beef, chicken, pork, variety of salads and sinfully delicious cakes which the nuns themselves bake. Then we started our journey to Rio de Janeiro which we reached at 9:30 in the evening.

I think I should stop here. In my next letter: Rio de Janeiro, Petropolis, Salvador and Olinda!

Sr. Mary John, OSB