

2013 CIB Conference Meeting in Brazil

Travel log by Sister Mary John Mananzan, Part Three

September 14 – 17

OLINDA

We took an AVIANCA plane from Salvador to Recife which is the capital of the region of Pernambuco. Olinda, which was our destination, is the next city to Recife which is frequented by tourist because it is beautiful. That is why it is called O Linda! (O Beautiful!)

The convent of St. Gertrude is on the hill and has a magnificent view all around-- showing the sea, the beach, the whole of the city. When one is on the main avenue one sees it in front like a palace on the hill it's attached to an old baroque Church. Outside the convent is a plaza where tourists flock to look at the view. There are also stores of art, artifacts and a souvenir market all the way to the Cathedral which is at the other end of the Plaza.

The next day, which was a Sunday, we went to mass at the Cathedral. It is the simplest Cathedral we visited, no decorations outside, and just one big statue of Jesus at the main altar and some statues at side altars. There are no baroque decorations. On one side altar is the tomb of Dom Helder Camara who was archbishop of Olinda for more than 15 years. He is known all over the world as the Archbishop who was in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. After the mass, the present Archbishop who is also a Benedictine monk talked with us in the conference room and told us about himself and the diocese.

Then we visited the Benedictine monks who are further down the hill. Their new abbot is only 38 years old and only one year as Abbot and whose name is Joao Maria. I told him we are tukayo because my name is Maria Joao. We had a wonderful lunch on one side of their cloister square and the tables all had white table cloth and white roses and it looked like a wedding banquet. They have a gourmet cook that presented dishes that are not only delicious but artistically arranged. For example he had roast beef slices on a platter all around a squash bowl that had thick shrimp soup. His chocolate cake was also sinfully delicious. Then we had a tour of the monastery. When we arrived at the recreation room, a monk named Placid sat on the piano and played modern Brazilian dance music. After him, Mother Martha Lúcia followed and played the popular boogie piece which we all play. So Sr. Judith pulled me and we did a Boogie dance exhibition.

We went home and had an afternoon free where we could buy some souvenirs. Pero things are very expensive here. In the evening we had a Brazilian picnic supper in the big veranda of the College with the beautiful view of the city. We had some Brazilian food. One is called Tapioca but is not like the one we have because this is put on a small frying pan with some cheese and corn and then it is folded into two and put on a napkin and you eat it like tacos. I drank with it a soft drink called guarana which tastes like root beer. Then there was Brazilian music and they taught us to dance the quadrille. The next morning, my bunions began to get inflamed as I was all the time wearing closed shoes.

The next day after breakfast, we went down to the town --actually to the beach house of the, Sisters. We passed by but did not stop at the other school, a College of our Sisters and at the Social Action Center. There is another school but it was not along our way. The sisters from these 3 communities met us at the beach house. There are 10 rooms in this house and they have their Superior meetings here aside from its being vacation house. We had buko merienda and we viewed the picture exhibits showing the different apostolates of our Sisters--pastoral work, social action work, work with women and the elderly, etc. AT this point, I could hardly walk so Sr. Magdalena lent me a flip-flop and I just carried my shoes. From here we went to visit the Sisters of our Lady of the Mountain, a contemplative Benedictine convent who has a young Abbess who is very Abbess like in her whole way of gesturing and moving-- not in an aristocratic way but in a very graceful, venerable way. One Sister noticed that I was carrying my shoes so she gave me a plastic bag for it. We had little hours with them and festive lunch. Later on, I was told that in spite of the serene and beautiful atmosphere of the convent, the environment where the convent is located is quite dangerous because there are many drug addicts and they don't hesitate to break in even during the day. So I understood why there was a police car in front of the convent. The Sisters asked for security while we were

visiting. When we arrived back at St. Gertrude, there was a dance program by the students showing us the different kinds of Brazilian dance. Their costumes are usually fluffy blouses with bare midriffs and colorful, voluminous skirts. There was a particularly complicated dance called FREVO which is taught in a special dance school. It is full of complicated footsteps, a lot of jumping and with small umbrellas which the dancers put under their legs with one hand when they jump to be caught by the other hand.

The next day, our last day, I had to use a wheel chair because I couldn't step on my right foot. So I traveled like that to Sao Paulo. Our Sisters from there picked me up from the airport and I greeted the Sisters gathered at the recreation room on a wheel chair. But their infirmarian, Sr. Shirley gave me a very effective anti-inflammation pill and put anti-inflammatory salve on my foot. That is how I left Brazil—on a wheel chair. I then flew to Rome via Amsterdam to give a course at San Anselmo. But that is another story.