

## ETHIOPIA: The Promised Land of Mission



Ethiopia is a very ancient, traditional and beautiful country, surrounded with mountains, hills and nature, which can be found in the Bible. It is situated in the East of Africa, which is bordered with Somalia in the East, Sudan in the West, Eritria and Djibouti in the North, and Tanzania and Kenya in the South. Ethiopian people are very proud of themselves with their history story of

Queen Esther and

### *Bole International airport*

King Salomon. Even though Ethiopia has a great connection to the Bible (Ps 86), majority people are Orthodox and Muslim, while only less than 1% is Catholic. The Catholic faith is

not deep because Catholic is very much influenced by the Orthodox. In the Catholic church, people worship in two rites: Latin rite and Ethiopian rite.

In Latin rite, the priests dress and celebrate the same way with Roman Catholic, while in Ethiopian rite, the priests dress and celebrate the same way with Orthodox.



### *Beautiful mountain*



Ethiopia is a semi desert country; many times, people suffer with drought, which is very risky leading to famine. Most of the people are farmers who depend totally on the rain. If there is no rain for 2 years continuously, there is the high risk for famine. In 1982, FMM sisters responded to the invitation of the Jesuits to help Wolayta and Hadiya tribes, which are located in the southern of Ethiopia, who were facing the famine. After finishing the

famine, we decided to remain in Ethiopia and started to open the new and first mission in Gosa, Oromo region, also in the South. In 2009, responding to the need of the people, we decided to come back to Hadiya tribe, Mazoria area, Hosanna Vicariate, which we took over from Good Shepherd sisters, who left this mission one year before we moved in. I was one of the 4 chosen

sisters: three final profess sisters and one temporary vow sister to start this new mission. I remained in Ethiopia until 2020.

## I.

In our lives, the Lord has his own plans for us that many times we don't understand. He surprises us with unexpected moments that, later, we could understand God's providence and presence in our lives. Leaving Ethiopia in 2020, ten days before the Covid broke out, I never thought that some day I can have a chance to see this mission land again, but, in fact, I did. I was very happy to see it and the people whom I served and loved. Life is always filled with wonders and surprises.



*Sister house in Mazoria*

Our journey to Ethiopia had started with the group, “*The Viet Apostolate of Divine Mercy*” in the USA. This group gathers those who want to do charitable work, to support the missionaries and people in the poor and isolated missions. They alternate the year going to mission trips in different countries to experience “real” mission life and to support missionary priests and sisters. The other year, they remain in the USA to do the fundraising. In 2022, they spent two weeks in Calcutta with Missionary of Charity sisters (mother Teresa sisters). This year, they wanted to experience the mission in Africa continent, where they never have been before. They found me and I became their guider for two weeks journey. With my 13 years-experience living in Africa, we were able to show them two very poor and isolated mission places. One is in Mazoria, where our FMM sisters are serving Hadiya people and where I was in that community for 10 years; and one in Dhadim-Dubluk, where the Spiritan priests are serving Borena people. Two are totally different from each other.

The two weeks mission trip, as the group, later, described it as an “*unforgettable trip*” truly remains in their hearts the moments of wonders, sympathy, opened eyes, sadness, inconvenience, uncomfortable life, admiring the missionaries, appreciation for whatever we have, and the most, the profound experience of God's presence in the midst of human sufferings. Words can't express the whole, but, better, seeing with their own eyes.

The first moment of their time in Ethiopia, the group experienced limitation/lacking of water and electric in everywhere. In the villages, most of the people don't have water running into the house. They have to spend many hours to get in line buying a container of 25 little of water; then carry it in their back

to home around 3 or 4km in the muddy and rocky roads. If they have money, they can pay for “gari (the cart run by the donkey which carries water, crops, things to the market) to deliver water at home with triple price. Many local people, most of their life never have comfortable experience of hot or warm 2. shower while many times we are taking for advantage in the USA. We think it is a basic need, but for someone in some places, it is a luxury life that they never dream of it or experience it. **Water problem:**



*Gari delivers water to each house*

The first day we went to “World Vision” place and the opened market to see how people’s lives are struggling with limited water. It was an opened eyes and shock to the group who come from the USA and never saw it before.

*Get in line to buy water*

Everything was so surprise and wonder. Many

*Collecting dirty rain water*

questions came to their minds: How can the people bring the water home?

*under the bridge*

How many containers of water they can afford every day to use for a family of at least 6 or 7? How can they keep the hygiene without water? How often they can have bath (no shower) and wash their clothes?

Is the water clean enough for drinking? Many questions came to the group’s minds as they continued to observe and discover many “interesting” things that happened during their time in Ethiopia for 2 weeks.



In the same line with water, the electric is unreliable and expensive for the poor. Gas is not yet reach to this level. Most of the time we don’t have electric and it will

follow with no internet and no water because we can't pump the water from the well. Many times, the group could not call home (USA) or check email because of no internet and the phone's battery 3.



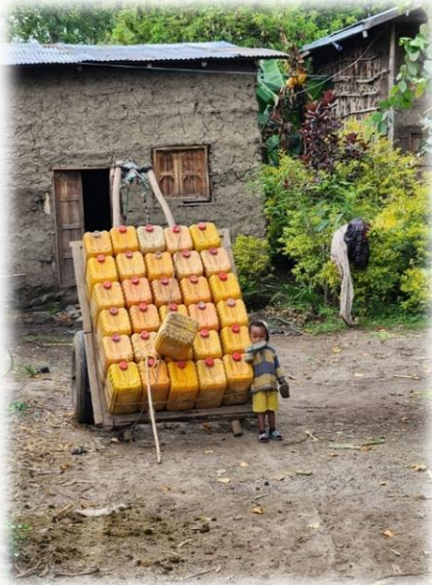
was finished. Everything seemed slower, less busy and less productive in here comparing to our fast, busy and productive society in the USA. People need time and patience to adapt with this life style. In Mazoria, drilling a well costs a lot of money and it has to go down between 270 to 280 meters; some areas could be 300 meters. Life in the village is very limited. Most of the people also don't have electric line like water. At night, they either use candles or kerosene for little light, or can pay for only one little bulb from their neighbors.

Many times, the group had experiences of taking a shower with cold water because of no electric to heat the water. And also, during the shower, the cold water suddenly stopped, because of no more water. We went to bed

*Buying water at "World Vision"* with a half clean and a half dirty. These experiences became our rich

stories

*"Gari" is ready to go Women and children carry the water*



*according to their capacity*

to share with our families and friends. The group started to feel, to taste and to sympathize more with the local people. And only when



we can have those experiences, we are able to understand more human

*Hand pump rain water – Collecting rain water*

4.

suffering and to be more grateful to God for whatever we have received each day in our lives.

**House of Hadiya tribe**

In order to understand more people’s lives, we visited people houses in Mazoria village; to see how people and animals live together in the same house. In this Hadiya tribe, they have 2 kinds of house: the hut house with leaves and the iron sheet house. The iron sheet house has the rectangle shape and taller, while the hut house has the round shape like the tent with the leaves roof, darker and lower. For the 2 kinds of houses, people use the same special kind of



*Hut house*



*Iron sheet house*

tree to make the frame of the house either round or rectangle, then they mix with straw of *teff* (like straw of rice) to make the wall. The roof of iron sheet house is the iron sheet, while the roof of the hut is leaves. For the hut house, every few years, they have to add more leaves, later, have to change completely new leaves. The iron sheet house is much stronger and more expensive than the hut house. We encourage the people to make the iron sheet house because



*Straws to make the wall of the house*



*Wood to make the house*



*Wood and straw are ready*

it

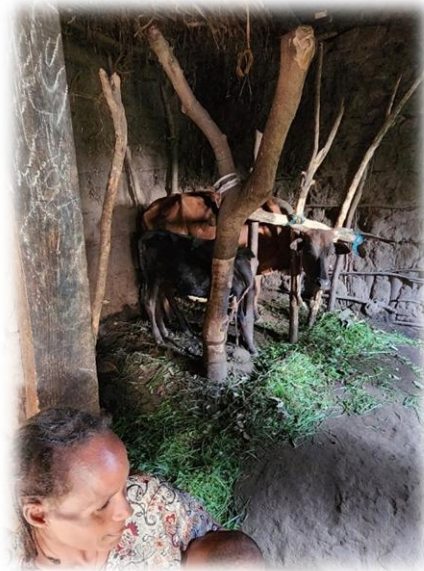
can last longer and also can collect the rain water when the season comes.

The visiting of the house opened people’s eyes to see each culture has its own way to make the house. In many hut houses, the animals live together with human, and the cooking on the floor (with fire

wood & 3 rocks) is also inside the house. Human, animals and cooking are all together in one place, 5. make the house so congested and unhealthy. Their lives are under basic needs, but the people are



*Hadiya children  
Inside the house for 6 people  
house*



*Cow and human share a house  
The room and bed for 3 girls*



*The owner greeted the visitors  
The kitchen is in one corner of the*

happy with whatever they have, even though they may dream for a better life.

*The land which the group agreed to help with iron sheets and nails for this poor widow with 4 children*

6.



**Food:** Living in the poor condition, food is also another concern for many people in Ethiopia, who is struggling to feed the family each day. In this area, the common food is maize and bean. Daily, they only can afford to have *Nufro, Bullenta*



*Nufro (boiled maize & bean)* or *Kita*. All of these foods come from either maize or maize powder (very mature corn and have a lot of starch) and bean. Sometimes they can have rice with bean, but for them, rice is not heavy enough to keep them long for a day. On the occasion, they can have *Injera*, which is made from *Kita (maize powder)*

*Teff powder*. *Teff* is one kind of seeds which are small like sesame seeds. When people harvest the seeds, they use its straw for making the wall of the house with mud, or for cow's food. *Injera* is a special food in Ethiopia, *Injera with meat sauce*

which they all like it, but many of them can't afford to have it daily. They can eat *injera* with meat sauce or bean sauce. Most people can afford to have meat only three or four times per year. Ethiopia is the only country which plants *teff*. The other countries may import *teff* or *teff powder* to make *injera*.

*Bulenta (maize powder)*



*House of Borena tribe:*

Leaving Hadiya tribe,



where our FMM sisters have served for 15 years, we came to the "territory" of the Spiritan fathers, where they have served the 7. Borena for 50 years. Most of these people are displaced, move from place to place because of lacking of food and water

*The children with visitors and priests*

*The hut where they sleep every night*

*The church/chapel*



Leaving behind water and food problems, we continued our journey to visit many chapels/churches and classrooms which the priests and sisters are taking care of. The roads to reach to these places are most muddy and difficult (enter into the narrow ways), but with God's grace, termination and patience, we could achieve it.

*church*



*Inside the*

Seeing hardships that the missionaries are facing, listening to their stories, admiring their efforts to serve the poor with whole heartedly and joy, our eyes are opened to recognize God's presence in these missionaries and the poor. This is like God's words saying to us, "The narrow roads that lead to heaven"



*Skillful jumps which overcome the difficulties*

*Finding the way to pass the muddy roads*

8.



There are a lot of works to do in the mission field, where the number of Catholic is very small and young. One priest has to take care of five or six sub-stations in the interior villages. In the dry season, the priests use motorbike as the mean of transportation. In the raining season, many times the motorbike or car can't pass by; the only mean is to walk with our foot. In some parts of the road, we had to jump through the mud and water. This situation makes us to be more aware and grateful

for



*Land for future church in Kutube*

what we have in the USA, with nice and convenient roads.

Despite the roads are bad, we were able to see the land for the future church and the other churches.

People live

very far from the main church; therefore, they need to have chapel where they can gather for prayers and communion service every week. They have Holy Mass one per month.

**School:**

Leaving the church, we continued our visit to FMM's sister kindergarten in Mazoria. We have over 350 children in 5 classrooms with 12 teachers. The number of children is increasing every year, because we have the good curriculum and we are the only school in the area to give food and water to



*Children,*

*teachers, visitors & sisters*

*St. Gabriel KG in Mazoria*

children since at home many of them can't afford to have clean water and food. We believe that only education can make changes in the new generation. The parents slowly understand the importance of education and send them to school instead of keeping them at home for taking care of



*Serving food to each class*



animals and do house work. In school, the children learn English at the early age, learn about God, hygiene (the most problem in here), behavior, serving and loving each other. They are happy and feel proud of themselves for the service.



*Happy to serve others*



*Playing time after brunch  
Old tires can use for playing*



**Bishop of the Vicariate of Hosanna:**

Nearly the end of our trip, the group had chance to meet our Bishop of Hosanna. He is very simple and truly a good shepherd to his sheep. At this moment, he has to take care of two Vicariates since the other Bishop *Meeting with the*



*Bishop* is sick and retired, while waiting (already 1 year) for the new Bishop. Despite his busy schedule, he came to see us at our house in Bushulo, Hawasa. I was very happy to see him again, who I had worked with for 10 years. During the meeting, we shared our stories and listened to the stories of the people in the Vicariate since I left four years ago. The sharing helped the group to understand more the people's situation and also their life conditions. There are some possibilities for the future assistance. Before leaving us, he blessed us and thanked us for helping his Vicariate.

*Receive blessings from the*

10.



*Bishop*





**The gift giving day:**

The last two day before leaving Mazoria to another mission, with the financial help of the group, we organized a gift giving day to the poor. We were able to help 100 families with 50kg of maize to each family. The poor appreciate more maize and bean than rice,



***Waiting outside to receive maize*** because they can satisfy their stomach and keep them survive. They can't miss these foods in their lives. The sister had a list of poor people and called them to come in two days. We call them to group because two families shared one sag of 100 kg maize. We could see the happiness on their faces when they were waiting outside patiently to their turn. When they got maize, they tried very hard to bring it home. That is the true gift to the poor during the dry season.

***One sag for 2 families***



***Pray before distributing***

***Dividing maize into two***



***Carrying home with happiness***

*O beautiful are the feet of those missionaries, who dare to take a risk, to leave their own countries and live among the poor and needy in Ethiopia.*



*FMM sisters in Mazoria, Hosanna*

*FMM sisters in Bushulo, Hawasa*



*Spiritan priests from Nigeria & Ethiopia*



*people.*



*Fr. Juan, Comboni missionaries comes from Spain. He has spent all his life, over 50 years to serve the people in Ethiopia. He celebrates Mass for our FMM sisters most daily in Hawasa with some local*



***Whatever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me (Mt 25:40)***

***Fr. Joseph Luan Trinh, Salesian of Don Bosco priest comes from Vietnam, has served the people in Tigray (Northern of Ethiopia) for the last 15 years.***

In concluding to my trip, I am grateful to God for the success of this wonderful trip, from the beginning to the end, the trip that opened our eyes to see human's sufferings. I thank my Regional Superior, Sr. Leticia, who allowed me to go. I thank *The Viet Apostolate of Divine Mercy* group, who invited me to go and took care all of my expenses. Now they are growing a "Love for Africa" and preparing to take another trip to Mozambique in Oct/24 to support missionaries. I thank my supervisor, James Jahnz, who

supports and encourages me all the time. And of all, I thank all FMM sisters and friends, who pray for me, encourage me and are always interesting on my mission reach out to the poor under FMM name. God bless you all.

*Sr. Chan Nguyen,*

*FMM*



