

Reflections on Regency



As a regent in Brazil, I accompanied two novices, Jardel and João Lucio, from Manaus, the capital of the state of Amazonas, to remote river villages. Our mission was to help six priestless communities celebrate Advent/Christmas and Mr. Thomas J. Kenny, SJ welcome in the New Year.

The people we visited are known as ribeirinho or river people. The ribeirinhos are descendants of the first Portuguese who settled in the Amazon and married into the native population. Their life is based around the river, planting crops on the flood plains during the low water and harvesting right before the waters rise.

The first community we arrived at, São João, was typical of others we would visit. Fifteen or so wooden stilt houses along two or three kilometers of river bank with a small chapel at the center of the village. Chickens, ducks, guinea fowl, cats, dogs, pigs and goats roamed freely through the village.

We spent time visiting and praying with families in the community. During these visits from home to home the flora and fauna were breathtaking.

The community gathers for liturgy in the chapel every Sunday even though they are visited by a priest only once or twice a year. João Lucio and Jardel led the liturgies of the word and the people responded enthusiastically with traditional hymns. Singing Ave Maria in the Amazon at sunset to the sound of river dolphins splashing around for fish outside the chapel is an unforgettable memory.

The faith of the ribeirinho people in the Lord and loyalty to the Church in the absence of priests and religious was inspiring. Their dependence on nature leads them to thank God for each fish caught and each fruit plucked. They appeared confident that the Lord was with them in their daily struggle to survive. The Lord, through the hospitality of the ribeirinhos, certainly filled our voyage with a bounty of warmth and kindness.

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