

October 27, 2009 - Benin – Personal experience of a missionary from the 140th Missionary Expedition (2009)



(ANS – Cotonù) – I left with the 140th Missionary Expedition on September 27, destination Cotonù, Benin, where I received a great deal of teaching. Here in Benin, when I look at my poor accommodation with only the basic essentials, with an African toilet and shower, I tell myself that we have made our lives far too complicated and broadened our needs so much without succeeding in making ourselves happy.

Last Sunday from our mission I saw poor people leaving their humble houses with tin roofs held on with large stones to stop the wind blowing them away, all dressed in their best multicolored clothes to go to Mass, cheerful and happy to be able to practice their faith. Then I thought about the madness of people in our Western world: possessions and more possessions, worried about not having everything, worn down, without real joy, seeking scraps of happiness, thinking only about the god money.

In Cotonù, the Salesians are looking after a large parish with eight missionary out-stations, a youth center, and a large vocational training school. The parish is the focal point for the whole area and the heart of many activities for the whole Christian community, groups, associations, the choir, and catechism.

At present there are 300 students in the vocational training school, which was built thanks to the support of various organizations, and especially thanks to the generosity of the Basque government. The main problem, however, is the maintenance, upkeep, and running costs: we are speaking about a vocational training school, and it needs material for the workshops and for the updating and development of things.

Here, the state provides only the most elementary things, and families have to decide between eating and studying; they usually prefer to eat in order to survive. For its maintenance the vocational training school has only the fees paid by the students; 200 euros is the full cost for the course, and it is the only income the school has. The problem is providing not only for the youngsters but also for the staff and teachers.

We from the first world can change this situation. We are concerned about vocational training, and there are youngsters who have had no opportunity for training and are looking for qualifications. We Salesians have the space but we need someone to help us. In conclusion, here I have come to understand what generosity is, and I want to invite people to cultivate it in order to do something practical for the missions.

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who comes from the Seville Province