

MY TRIP HOME ~ Part 2 By Fr. Mike

Instead of inviting the families to come to our home, I took the food to their homes. The problem with this system of distribution is that not everyone would receive food on December 31st, as they live far apart from each other. Secondly, I am not acquainted with ninety percent of the beneficiaries, so I needed to ask for directions. The positive aspect was that this method preserves their privacy. They did not know that they were on the list, so there was an element of surprise, some never expected me to come to their home. Personally, it gave me the opportunity to know their home situation.

The distribution took two days, December 31st and January 1st. It took four phases. My younger brother, John, accompanied me on the first phase. He knew those families and where they live. My two nephews and a niece accompanied me on the second phase. The local Catechist accompanied me on the third distribution. My nephew, who lives in Pico Rivera, and my brother John, helped me on the last distribution. Here are few examples of the recipients of this grace of God. The fathers of two of the families were blind, their wives did everything. These wives do not have serious jobs, they work here and there. One lady was both a widow and blind, and the son who takes care of her is himself disabled. In another family, the woman has three or four children, and she is blind. The husband walked away from the family, and she is completely dependent on her 13 year old daughter. There were widowers, too, and couples.

This project was not planned, it was completely spontaneous. However, I believe it was God ordained because of the many beautiful things that came out of it. By participating in this project and visiting these families, my nephews and nieces saw a world that was not obvious to them in that town. They were so touched by this experience that my nephew, who lives in Pico Rivera, promised to buy more bags of rice the next time I go home. I said to him; "From our visit it is clear that they need more than rice. A few are blind and have no help. There is no government program or public assistance for them." My niece replied; "I am concerned about the 13 year old girl with a blind mother. What about her education?"

On January 11th, I went back to Lagos to be with my uncle who was sick. He is the younger brother of my mother. According to the family, he had been waiting for me. When I entered his room, to the surprise of the wife and the nurses, he opened his eyes, smiled, and spoke for the first time in three weeks. We talked late into the night. He was happy and relaxed. The next day, I celebrated Mass in his room, Anointed him, and prepared him for the inevitable. Every day, I would recite the Rosary with him in the morning and in the evening. Like his mother, reciting the Rosary was his favorite prayer. Things got worse on Wednesday, by Thursday afternoon his breathing became rapid and shallow. At 10:14 pm on Thursday he took his last breath. It was as if he knew that I was about to go back to Los Angeles, and he did not want me to leave him again. He left before I left. Although I am deeply saddened by his death and my inability to be at his funeral, I am happy he got his wish -- to see me, and to have me there when he took his last breath. I ministered to him as a priest and a nephew, just as I did for his sister.

I left Lagos on the evening of Monday, January 18th, and arrived at Atlanta International Airport in the early Tuesday morning. In Atlanta, we walked straight to immigration, presented our documents, and went to the connecting flight to Los Angeles. Los Angeles County requires all returning residents and visitors to register with the city. I did. They also require every returning resident and visitor to quarantine for 10 days. I quarantined for the next ten days, starting on January 19th. My trip was designed by God, everything fell in place.

To God be the glory and praise!