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"Caring for those who once cared"

Bernadette Agna writes from the Philippines about inviting her friends to visit a home for the elderly run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, and how they were enriched by this experience.

09/22/2016

"We should accompany others so that no one is left, or can feel, abandoned. Our charity has to be affectionate, full of human warmth." - St. Josemaria Escriva, Christ is Passing By, 36

I learned about the value of visiting the sick and the poor back in college, when I attended spiritual formation activities in centers of Opus Dei: Anihan Technical School, while still in UP Los Baños; and afterwards, at Tahilan Residence as a young professional working in Manila. From the teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva, I learned that the poor, the sick, and children are the persons closest to God. By sharing our time with them, we make them feel God's love, as St. Josemaria personally experienced.

Mulling over the words of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which runs from December 8, 2015 to November 20, 2016, where he mentioned that this is a special time *“to contemplate the mystery of mercy... to enter into the heart of the gospel, where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy,”* I resolved

to make as many visits to the poor as I could, together with friends.

Since the elderly have always had a special place in my heart, I thought I would start there. I went with my colleagues Ma'am Aleli, Ed, and Ginette to visit the San Lorenzo Ruiz Home for the Elderly in Pasay City, which is run by the Little Sisters of the Poor.

In preparation for that visit, a colleague of mine thought of making a *love glass jar* with the tag "*To care for those who once cared...*" to raise money for our beloved elders.

Indeed, the spirit of generosity was kept alive in our office as colleagues managed to put in their monetary donations with the thought of providing for the physical needs of the elderly.

When we visited them, we brought bread and the cash donations to contribute to support their material

needs. I remember vividly the time we spent with some of the elderly as they were having lunch. While others could manage on their own, there were some who could no longer eat by themselves and needed someone to assist them. That was our opportunity to help them in a very direct way. That assistance, no matter how small it may seem, meant a whole lot to them. It is said that *“their joy increases as you share with them your smiles, presence, time, talent, and skills”*.

Truly, the short time shared with the elderly touched our hearts, as we listened to their stories: trying their best to struggle even if they already found things difficult; smiling even when they admitted to being lonely. Their helplessness seemed to remind me of babies needing the care and attention of those who are able to help. That experience also fostered in us gratitude towards the nuns and

volunteers who were taking care of them in that Home, trying to give them the best care possible. It also made us grateful for our own lives, acknowledging what we have and being happy for what we lack knowing that we are loved by God, not due to our own merits but through His mercy.

As Pope Francis told the youth during his visit to the Philippines last year, [we need] *“to learn to be evangelized by the poor, by those we help, the sick, the orphans, they have so much to give us.”* Indeed, they have so much to give us – sense of gratitude, peace, and hope.

For more information about San Lorenzo Ruiz Home for the Elderly, please visit: <https://www.lsp-sanlorenzorui.org/>

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