

Going to Mass in Ruwais

Belisa and Rafael are a Venezuelan couple who recently moved to the United Arab Emirates for their work. Since then, they have had the joy of being able to go to Mass every week.

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Belisa:

One of the good things about spending time in the desert is that the sense of vastness and emptiness

gives one clarity of mind to be able to think better.

I am a doctor who recently married. Rafa and I have been living for only a short time in Ruwais, a little village of the Emirates two-and-a half hours away from Abu Dhabi, the closest city.

To be honest, Ruwais is not even a little village: it's a big camp set up around an oil refinery where practically everybody is a company employee. Since we arrived here, we have had the joy of being able to go to Mass every week.

The logistics of the Mass

The experience is very special. Since this camp-village is the property of a State enterprise that is Moslem, the Catholic community does not have permission to build a church where it can meet.

Here, the Catholics, who are mainly people from the Philippines and India, have a well organized system, for going to a different house each week for the celebration of Mass. The object is not to bother any of their Arab neighbors two weeks in a row.

At least 80 persons, including a great many children, attend each Mass, as well as weekly catechism classes. Of all the people who attend, only four of us are westerners.

The priest, who is also from India, has to come from Abu Dhabi to celebrate Mass at seven-thirty in the morning. Afterwards, he goes to another camp-village to celebrate another Mass, and later returns home, which is a two-hour journey. The few priests in this country do this every day in different towns.

In that simple house, over a modest altar presided over by a very small cross, the miracle of

Transubstantiation is carried out, and Jesus becomes present so that each one of us can share the great banquet of the Bread of Eternal Life. In that moment, one clearly realizes how marvelous it is to belong to the Catholic Church.

This is the Church, the great family that welcomes you in any corner of the world where you are.

Undoubtedly, it's not all that simple. For Mass to take place, the effort of many people is needed: of the priest, of the one who lends his house, of the deacon coordinator, of the people who come--of everyone.

I have this Indian woman right beside me who is so different from me in many ways; yet down deep, we are very much alike, because the same struggle and the same Faith unite us. Surely she too considers it a gift from heaven to be able to have Mass in Ruwais.

Rafael:

Being here makes me realize that a person is very fortunate to have grown up in a Catholic country. Although I think that since we have everything so close at hand (“right under your nose”, my mother-in- law would say) we don’t realize the tremendous blessings that are ours. I now regret all the lost opportunities for taking a few steps more to visit the tabernacle in the hospital, or go to any one of the numerous churches on a weekday to attend Mass and receive Communion.

In countries like Venezuela many people are “cultural” Catholics: you are born and then baptized, with festivities included; you reach third grade and you make your First Communion along with all your classmates (also with plenty of festivity); in tenth grade you receive Confirmation with “panas” (more

festivities); you are married by the Church (with yet more celebration). And we seldom pause to realize how great it is to be Catholic. Certainly celebration should be a part of all this since these events are truly occasions for great joy, yet not simply because they are “cultural,” but because of the great significance of all these steps throughout the life of a person who is striving to live in the presence of God!

Here the people who go to Mass don’t go for any “cultural” reasons: they are convinced that what they believe is the truth and that no effort is futile. This must be the reason that the atmosphere one notices here is so special.

Now I understand better those assuring words of St Josemaría in *The Way*: that when we read, and then make our own, the life of Jesus

Christ, the people around us take notice.

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