



My Amazon, My Mission

Contributed by Fr. Michael Do, SVD

The Amazon, in fact, is a large area of old forest located in South America, covering 2,124,000 square miles and touching nine countries. More than 60 percent of the Amazon forest is located in Brazil. The Amazon is the largest rainforest in the world and home to thousands of large and small rivers. All of these rivers flow into a mother river called the Amazon River, which has the largest waterflow in the world. The Amazon is like two lungs lying on both banks of the Amazon River with the trachea going down the middle and all sorts of smaller rivers spreading to both sides. In the Amazon, there are many indigenous tribes. Some of them are completely isolated and have never had any contact with the outside world.

The Amazon region has been in the news recently because of wildfires, water pollution caused by the exploitation of natural resources and the invasion of outsiders who robbed from the native land. Last year, Pope Francis held a summit to find solutions for the challenges the Church is facing in the Amazon. One major problem is the shortage of priests. Many Catholic communities are scattered deep in the forest

where believers are only able to celebrate the Eucharist with a priest once a year. In addition to pastoral responsibilities, the Church in the Amazon must work to protect the land and promote human rights of ethnic minorities. Church leaders strive to advocate for the preservation of natural resources, as well as the God-given nature in the region.

**When we hear about "Amazon,"
we probably think of the
world-wide company
specializing in selling products
on the Internet.**

**I would like to share about
another Amazon - the first
and real Amazon.**

My name is Fr. Michael Do, SVD and that is the Amazon where I'm doing missionary ministry. I live in a village deep in the Amazon, seven hours away from the nearest city by motorboat. The village is along the Arapiuns River, which has an average width of three kilometers and flows into the Amazon River. The main means of transportation here is by motorboat or ship.

The village I live in has 34 families, mostly Catholic. The parish where I work has 53 communities in 53 large and small villages that contain between 10 and 250 families. More than half of those are tribal or ethnic minorities. Most of the communities are scattered along the banks of the Arapiuns. Traveling by boat from the beginning of the river to the mouth takes



14 hours. Most villages have no electricity, hospitals or shops, so the villagers travel to the city to purchase their necessities.

People in the Amazon have very simple lifestyles. Most of them work in agriculture and the only food they grow is a root vegetable called cassava. Despite living on the banks of the river, no one seems to live on fishing. Without electricity to run a refrigerator, there's no means to maintain fresh fish. Families use their small boats to catch five to 10 small fish daily to provide just enough for their dinner.

The village where I live is in the middle of the Amazon River, so it takes seven hours by boat to travel to the beginning or the end of the river. Thus, my missionary trips usually last two weeks. Going from village to village, I work, eat and sleep on a 15-meter boat. For each trip, I must bring food, clothing and gasoline for two weeks, plus dry food to help the poor families. When I run out of food, I usually use a net to catch fish. And like other missionaries here, I have learned to sleep in a hammock because there are no beds.

Every two weeks, I travel to different communities to celebrate Mass, administer sacraments, visit Catholic families and bring food to poor families. When I come

upon villages that have electricity, I give computer courses to encourage young people to continue learning more about the world. In the future, if possible, I would like to buy sewing machines to teach the women to sew. I'm also thinking about buying cultivators to plow the land and encourage the farming families to grow various plants, other than cassava.

An interesting fact is that people in the Amazon are not used to eating vegetables or fruit, thus they do not grow them at all. In contrast, I love vegetables and fruit. So, when I am home, I use my little hoe to cultivate my garden and grow vegetables. Now, my garden has all kinds of vegetables: gourds, melons, spinach, sweet potatoes, beans and more. In some small ways, I hope to add some interesting colors to the Amazon world and to help the people here bring out their beautiful colors of diversity in simplicity.

That is my missionary ministry in the Amazon. So, when you make a purchase on Amazon.com, please remember to say a prayer for me, because only with prayer can we be connected with God's transforming power and everlasting joy.

Thank you for your prayers and support. May the Risen Lord bless you with good health and everlasting peace in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic.

