



Montfort EurHope 09: A Missionary Testimony from Portugal

FATIMA, Portugal - In the year of his priestly jubilee, Father Antonio Pereira, SMM, who is 75 years of age, is happy to tell us about one of his finest accomplishments as a missionary - the Center for Rehabilitation and Integration of Fatima (CRIF).

Father Antonio, can you tell us something about the CRIF Center?

It is an association of parents to accommodate children with disabilities. Founded in 1976, I saw myself in it, with the pressure from a group of parents who asked for my help. So I accepted the challenge and be with them as we realize the foundation of this center. We started humbly in a rented house. A few years later, we had to leave and transfer to a house of our own, in order to meet the growing needs. As the number continued to increase, we were forced to build a new house, larger and more adapted to the new situation. In 1991, this new house was already available with the help of the Sanctuary of Fatima that bought the old house and offered us the land to build the new one. Gradually, I understood the value and the grandeur of this institution.

The state subsidizes us and imposes its rules, as for the number of technicians, auxiliaries and volunteers. Currently, we have around 50 collaborators including psychologists, therapists and social workers. It is not an easy job, so we need capable and dedicated people. Now we have 130 hosts.

Its operation?

For now, we operate as a Day Center. The handicap persons are transported every day using our cars. A house project for the night is already ongoing and perhaps we can start by August. In fact, we have a good deal of money needed.

The good news of this work?

I see this work as a mission. These are the most vulnerable people and the most impoverished. They are, without a doubt, the most loved by God. The contact with these people is very enriching.

Basically, parents have problems accepting this situation and they suffer enormously. Having a child with disabilities is scary and eventually becomes a burden. And yet, we learn a lot from them. We are thankful because we are able to recognize our limits and our weaknesses.

The link with Montfort and its mission?

Personally, I see this work as Montfortian – *à la Montfort*. Besides, who is Montfort? He is someone who is always at the service of the poorest, a poor among the poor and a vagabond of God. His life is filled with solidarity gestures. In fact, even today, he would live poorly.

As for me, I am not Montfort! Nevertheless, I see in this service a very rich way to evangelize, to be in the 'peripheries', as Pope Francis asked.

Your final message to the readers?

I think I gave an idea about my service among people with disabilities. I can only thank God for this gift that I received from Him.

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