



ALBANIA



The Land of the Eagles

Quick Facts:

Population: 3,047,987

Languages: Albanian 98.8% (official - derived from Tosk dialect), Greek 0.5%, other 0.6% (including Macedonian, Romani, Vlach, Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian), unspecified 0.1%

Religions: Muslim 56.7%, Roman Catholic 10%, Orthodox 6.8%, atheist 2.5%, Bektashi (a Sufi order) 2.1%, other 5.7%, unspecified 16.2%

Capital: Tirana

Life Expectancy: 78.5 years

Literacy Rate: 97.6 %

Patron Saint: Our Lady of Good Counsel



The catholic church of Theth.

"Long live Christ the King! Long live Albania!"

Catholic in Albania have passed through very difficult times, even though the faith was brought to the country during the time of the Apostles. Albania was under a communist government for 45 years which wanted to erase all religion from the country. In 1967 all churches were closed down and it was forbidden to practice Christianity or show that you were Catholic in any way. Even speaking about Jesus or carrying a rosary was not allowed. Albania declared itself the first atheistic state- meaning the first country that does not believe in God. All missionaries were forced to leave the country. During this time, there were many brave Catholics who wanted to protect their faith and show their love for Christ. They gathered for hidden Masses, willing to risk their life just so they could worship God during Mass. Many people were martyred, meaning they died for their faith in Christ and for being faithful to Him. Several of them died saying, "Long live Christ the King! Long live Albania!" In 1990 the communist government in Albania collapsed and the people were free to practice religion publically again. Missionaries were able to come back to Albania and little by little the churches are being rebuilt and growing again.

The Martyrs of Albania



A Missionary in Albania

The following words are those of a missionary in Albania as she remembers the beginning of her orders' mission in Albania:

"At that time, 2001, the country was barely emerging from communism, something that could be seen at every turn, due to its devastating consequences. The panorama was desolate: endless grey buildings, which seemed to frame the prevailing sadness, or better said, the general lack of hope.

The way to the little village of Kalivaç, situated in the middle of the mountains, was long and nothing more than a dirt road up high, which crossed a river that did not always follow its course. Arriving in Kalivaç we realized that the town consisted of a school, a little store, the parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which would be entrusted to the Priests of the IVE, a small dispensary and the house of the sisters. Then between the mountains, far in the distance you could see a little house and then another.

The work of the sisters was mainly to help with the parish activities, and as far as possible, to attend the dispensary. Despite not knowing the language, they began with catechism classes. They would teach in Italian, and a few youth from the area would be the translators. The children who attended the school came walking from far away. Many of them had to cross the river, sometimes in very low temperatures, on foot, without shoes. At the end of school hours they would come to our house to learn Christian doctrine. It was beautiful to see their enthusiasm on arrival, despite having been at school all morning, and the school was in bad repair, to the point that many of the classrooms did not have glass in the windows, and the floor was missing in various places. Since our house did not have room for all of them, some of the classes were outside (in the freezing cold), nevertheless they remained attentive to the words of the religious.

I should point out that the children, like most of the people, were weather beaten and suffered without complaint the inclement weather, whether cold or windy, hard work, absence of electricity (they could only count on a few hours per day), the unpredictable food, etc. It was impressive how they treated the missionaries, seeking to give them the best that they had, even in the midst of their poverty. It was normal to see them come to our house to give us goat cheese, a bottle of milk, or some cabbages. They were very generous and very respectful of those sent by God.

I don't want to continue without telling you about the first Christmas in Albania. Father had suggested celebrating the Christmas Mass on the 24th of December, which presented various difficulties and we ran the risk that no one would be able to attend the solemn celebration, since it was extremely cold, and at night on the mountain everything is more difficult; on the other hand there was no light, the people did not live close by, etc. Nevertheless everything was prepared for a grand ceremony. The church was decorated with what we had, and the generator was started to light the church. When it was getting dark, it began to snow. We went to the church to wait. It was exciting when we realized that we could make out lights from far away, torches... it was the families coming down from the mountain, dressed in their traditional shepherd's dress, walking through the snow. It was the new Bethlehem. On the tips of some of the mountains shone the bonfires that the youth had made to announce the holy night. The church was full. At the end of the liturgy, the families went out of the church happy, greeting one another. Everything was covered in white."

A Missionary from Albania

"By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.", these are the words of St. Mother Teresa, who was born in Albania on August 26, 1910. She received her First Holy Communion at the age of five, a moment that began her deep love for Jesus and for souls. She had a great desire to be a missionary in order to teach many people about the love of Jesus. When she was 18, she joined an order of missionary sisters called the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland. She spent 20 working in Catholic schools as both a teacher and even a principal.

One day when she was traveling on a train, she heard the voice of God within her soul, calling her to a new mission. Jesus was asking her to take care of the poor in a special way, to spend the rest of her life loving those who had no one else to love them. She began a community of sisters called the Missionaries of Charity in India and soon had many other women who wanted to serve Jesus in the poorest of the poor. The sisters began homes to take care of people who were sick and dying, for orphans, for the disabled and abandoned. The love that Mother Teresa had for each person was clear by the way she treated them with dignity and care, no matter where they came from or their condition. She knew that when she was serving the poor, she was serving Christ.



Your Part to Play

- ✦ Pray for the missionaries and those they are serving in Albania
- ✦ Imitate Mother Teresa's love for the poor and try to see Jesus in every person
- ✦ Make a sacrifice to Jesus and do not complain when it is cold outside (the children in Albania oftentimes do not even have heat in their houses)
- ✦ Pray for all Christians who can not live their faith freely because of the government of their countries