ALBANIA: THE LAND OF THE EAGLES

BY SISTER CRUCIFIED METCALFE

Although brought to Albania during the time of the Apostles, being Catholic in Albania has been difficult. For 45 years Albania was under communist rule. One of the primary goals of the government was 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 illegal. Albania declared itself the first atheistic state—meaning the first country to publicly state that the nation does not believe in God. All missionaries were forced to leave the country. During this time, there were many brave Catholics who loved their faith and wanted to show their love for Christ. They gathered for Mass in secret. They were willing to risk their life so they could worship God.

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, people were free to practice religion publicly again. Missionaries were able to come back to Albania and little by little churches are being rebuilt and the faith is growing again.
ALBANIA 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

A Franciscan church in the center of Shkoder, Albania.
ON MISSION GROUND
IN ALBANIA

The words of the psalm, “How can I repay the Lord for all the good He has done for me?” (Ps. 116: 12) wonderfully expresses what we have experienced this past summer at our mission in Albania - our home for people living with disabilities. In 2006, we started a program called “field days.” It is two weeks of intensive and interactive activities for people living with disabilities. This initiative helps with physical and spiritual development and blesses everyone with many graces.

This year, 16 girls from Spain came to assist with field days. Field days gave them the opportunity to learn generosity, self-giving and patience. In addition, they received a great grace of gratuitous affection from the residents.

Each day was filled with prayer, games and workshops. Each morning we had workshops such as theater, painting, sewing, etc. The volunteers were surprised with all the talents the residents living with disabilities showed. The testimony was beautiful because despite their disabilities, they performed and completed the tasks with great generosity and effort. In caring for others, the girls had the chance to see Christ visible in other people. When we recognize Jesus in others, we feed, wash, cloth Christ Himself.

Christ says, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25, 40)
Our most notable and valuable time is spent in prayer. Our time with the Lord is our strength and prayer helps to transform our focus on personal struggles to recognize the needs of our neighbor. When we are given a task, the value is not in how much is accomplished but it is in how much love is put into it. We must always seek God in the work that is entrusted to us. Then our actions, however, small can be transformed into Jesus’ infinite love for us.

One last thing to mention is joy. In the competitions such as the wheelchair races, water balloon games, the songs and dances and other moments of play, true joy is seen. Joy is in the mystery of love; it is this Christ like love that fills one with joy.

In Christ and Mary Most Holy, Community "Our Lady of Good Counsel"

Albania-Arrameras

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

(Mt 25, 40).