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**The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle**  
*Diocesan priests serving the poorest of the poor since 1958.*

**May  
2026**



***"The Works of Human Hands Offered to the Lord..."***

***Dear Friends,***

On a visit to Peru back in January, together with Fr. Gabe Troy, I was able to visit our newest parish, San Juan Macias, Nuevo Progreso, in the diocese of Huánuco. San Juan Macias is a 19-hour drive from Lima, through the central part of the country. It is in what is considered the north central amazon jungle area of Peru. The parish currently has twenty-one communities, as well as the main town of Nuevo Progreso. Being in a rural area of Peru, the parishioners are low-income farmers, surviving on the crops they cultivate; rice, bananas, cacao, and coffee and they sell their produce at the local market in Nuevo Progreso.



Over three very full days we managed to visit eleven of the twenty-one communities, which involved driving over five hundred kilometers within the parish territory, as well as crossing the Huallaga River on a make-shift ferry. The Christian Communities we visited included: San Juan de Porongo, Santa Rosa de Shapaja, Nueva Union, Las Palmeras, San Pedro, Rio Blanco, Santa Rosa Alto de Yanajanca, Nuevo Jaen, La Morada, Santa Cruz and the main parish, San Juan Macias, in the town of Nuevo Progreso. We were blessed with good weather for the most part, although there were very heavy rains on the second day and I was grateful for the 4x4 traction on my truck!! While each community is unique, each gave a warm welcome to us priests. Their community leaders spoke to us of how they have sustained their Catholic faith amidst challenges. Our visit was an opportunity to enter the heart of the Gospel. The people demonstrated humility and sincere community values, which were shown when they spoke about their community's progress over the years as well as their hopes and aspirations for the future. The visit with each community began with a reading from the Sacred Scripture; *"The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord..."* (Acts 11:21)

In one community, the chapel coordinator shared that when the community was in its infancy, they were all strangers, coming from different provinces of Peru: Amazonas, Bagua Grande, Cajamarca, Jaen. Their Catholic faith was the common thread for how they were able to form a community. They stood as brethren because of their faith. He recounted how they began to dream of having their own place of worship and how they planned to lay the foundation stone for their chapel. It was very humbling for me to listen to how they came together as a community (poor people with very little resources) and how they raised the money for their place of worship. They planted rice. They folded up their sleeves and muddied their feet up to their knees, while enduring the hot sun to plant rice for a noble cause – to raise money for their chapel.

**T**his was a community effort - to build a house of worship. One member of their community loaned his own rice field to the congregation so that the community would have a fund to start their chapel building. This chapel will eventually be where the Eucharist is celebrated; the works of human hands are offered to the Altar of the Lord. The harvest from the rice fields, every grain, was the result of the effort and labor of the people. Listening to the farmers, I learned from them that each day and night they had to assess the weather, temperatures, and rain expectations so they could determine the opportune time to sow seed. Indeed, in a wondrous creation which involves the sun, moon, earth, wind, and rain-- all of these are involved in that plantation of rice. Our visit to some of these communities necessitated our crossing the Huallaga River, on an informal ferry known as a *'balsa'*. The rainy season in the Amazon causes a very high-water level with a strong current at the river. The sight of the make-shift ferry (two canoes tied together with a steel plate) did not instill great confidence in me as I drove my truck aboard. The people on the other side of this ferry ride had been without a priest and Sacraments for years. Crossing the river reminded me of the journey of the People of Israel who lacked a place to worship God, *"By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down and there we wept..."* (Psalm 137, 1-3). There is hope now that the St. James Society has crossed that river, into the region which thirsts for Mass and the Sacraments and the Word of God.



*Fr. Gabe and Fr. David on the make-shift ferry!*

*Fr. Gabe receiving a card of thanks*

*It is a hope that the mission will continue to support the people who do not have roofs, floors or walls for their chapel. For many, their tears and suffering are eased by the encounter among families from the various places in a particular pastoral zone. These families are connecting, sharing food and stories while opening their hearts, empowered by faith and recognition of the enduring effort of the communities. There is a rekindling of the spirit expressed in the exchange of prayers and well wishes.*

As we visited, we could see that the people really do understand how to be ‘missionary’ themselves. Many of them are devoting themselves to taking care of their outdoor places of worship. They are concerned for their neighbors and invite others to also participate in celebrations of sacraments and devotional practices. This is, indeed, the living out of the missionary spirit. In their humble service, they find out how to be creative too. Thus, the creative works of the Holy Spirit cannot be stifled, as we witness the people sharing in the mission of Christ. As St. Paul said, *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body...”* (Corinthians 12:12-13)



*Working on the chapel roof*



*With Every Good Wish in Christ,*

*Rev. David Costello, Director*



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