

The one thing I learned about going on mission trips is that I should go with no expectations- I got that down...but that didn't mean I had no fears or worries. I went fully knowing that I am weak. At the end I was blown away by God's amazing work that casts out all fears and worries, and I experienced firsthand the strength that is perfected in weakness, as a branch in His vineyard (not knowing Spanish well, how the group got along well together, how the kids spoke for us and handed out flyers and brought their friends, how we taught and learned from each other, how God spoke on our tongues and used us for His glory)

As selfish as it seems, I really wanted a spiritual retreat so badly, and I was so deeply in need of God to speak to me. Every day, I witnessed Him speaking to a couple of people in our group, and it was amazing and so clear, but I was so jealous...I was waiting for my turn. Until I realized that through these situations He WAS ALSO talking to me! He was telling me, "I am here! I see you and I'm holding your hand, just come...I love you!"

Coming back to the church after an afternoon at the market, we saw one of our groups sitting a couple of feet away listening so attentively to an older lady who seemed to be crying. Of course we stopped by and all sat down to comfort her. Maria opened her Bible and asked what she should read to her, so I mentioned the verse "Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest..." as Monica and I were trying to remember the reference. It took a while, so I think Maria just started reading something else for her, until she calmed down a bit. The very next day, our group shirts were being passed out and Monica looked at me with amazement and said, "MARIA, LOOK AT THE VERSE!!" I looked and it still hadn't hit me at that point. The next day, some of us were in the room chatting, and on the bed there was this book called "His Princess...Love letters from Your King" that Freda and I brought with us (Every girl should own this book). Monica would open the book randomly (for fun) and read a page for each of us. My turn came (I'm sure you can tell where this is going), and she began to read mine as I was tearing up- *"My princess... come to me. I saw you before you were born, even then you were on My mind, My daughter. I knew you were coming, and I did everything possible to express My love to you. I want you to come to Me. Come to Me when you feel strong and when you feel weary. Come to Me when you are rejoicing and when your spirit is crushed. I ask you to come not only to give you rest, but also because there is so much I want to teach you. There is more of me I want to reveal to you. You see, I did not create you for this fallen world, I created you for paradise. I've conquered sin and death for you, so come to me...and live. Love, Your King who is waiting"* and the key verse was Matthew 11:28, 29- *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* You might say this is coincidence...

My next encounter was when He showed me that I needed to do nothing but take nourishments from the root, when He said "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). So, on the mountain top, He told me I have to [learn to be nothing, because if I am something, then He can't be everything.]

My journey wasn't over yet. I came back and I was kind of wrestling with God, I told Him, I wanted to see Him more clearly...I get it, I need to come to You and I need to fully depend on You and be rooted in You, but how? So I came across these two verses

while Freda and I were doing our sharings- "*But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation*" (Ps 13:5) and "*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!*" (1 Jn 3:1). It was clear that I had missed something from before, even though it was so clear: His abundant love for me, and how I need to trust in that completely, because if He's not everything, I am truly nothing!

I thank each and everyone of you for being part of God's voice to me and for being so kind, loving, and joyous. I thank Abouna Zakaria for sharing with us the history of the church and the miracles. It was a great blessing to be amongst you all.