

I AM SAVED BY THE LOVING MERCY OF GOD, MY FATHER.

***A PERSONAL EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT BY DR. GABRIEL OON
(HOSPITALLER, SINGAPORE ORDER OF MALTA).***

LAWEDESKY TSUNAMI ACEH REHABILITATION MISSION

A Testimony:

Friday 24th March 2006.

Our party of four, Knight George Thia, Dame Jeannie Tien, and Consultant Architect and Friend of the Order, Mark Chin, arrived in Medan on the Friday 24th March 2006 to make our final site inspection of the repairs done to the second Parish Church of Aceh, the Parish Church of St. Josef at Lawe Deski which was in South east Aceh, and 250Km from Medan. This was a difficult land journey of 7 hours through very narrow and windy mountain roads, with land slips, and many pot holes in the road and in the active volcanic ranges, with Mount Punabulo still smoking! Our mission was to do a final audit to the repairs to the village church and the school buildings following the devastation caused by the Asian Tsunami, and the aftershocks, earthquakes and landslides.



Mr. Volke Stapke, Director of Malteser International(the Emergency Corp of the International Order of Malta) had offered us every assistance and had given us his mobile contact in the event of any emergency. There were 7 of us packed into the Ford SUV and we left at 11.00am, stopping an hour later at Brastagi to have a lunch at a Chinese Restaurant. Beyond Brastagi the mountainous roads became more torturous and filled with many pot holes, and there was no where we could stopped.

At about 4.00pm and about an hour from the village of Lawe Deski, we stopped at the deserted Church of St Vincent DePaul, to relieve ourselves. As I was standing on the latrine, I felt groggy, but was able to finish

urinating and go down to join the others. Feeling weak and groggy, I sat down for about five minutes. My companions, Jeannie, Mark and George noticed that I was pale and asked if I was OK. I was sweating and felt that this was due to the heat. I felt my pulse. It was strong and regular in beats. I told them I was OK and we left for Lawe Deski where we arrived at about 5.00pm.

At the Parish Church of St. Josef, we were warmly welcomed by the two Parish Priests, Fr. Francisikus SVD, Fr. Charles, the Principal of the School and the seminarian Michael. I was perspiring a lot, and felt that this could be due to the heat. Fr. Fransiskus showed me to my room which I shared with Mark. This was the room occupied by the seminarian Michael. On the wall was the picture of Pope Benedict XVI, and on his head board there were many rosaries and crosses.

We were given a spicy dinner, with fish, but my appetite was poor, and I just ate the tomatoes and cucumbers, and drank the water from my flask. After dinner we went to the newly repaired and beautiful church, which had been strengthened to withstand earthquakes. This was from the donations of funds from our Archdiocese Tsunami Crises and Coordinating Team(ATCCT) .

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*As we were doing the Station of the Cross at 8.00pm, I began sweating even more, felt more groggy, and had to sit down on the bench. I didn't feel any pain. My pulse was faster than usual. I closed my eyes and prayed the rest of my Rosary. When Mass started and Holy Communion was given, I took the Body and the Blood of Christ. Soon after that I felt more unwell, and needed to go to the toilet immediately to defaecate. I told Mark, to apologize to Fr. Franciskus that I was unwell, and could not stay on to the end of the Mass. In the bed room, the urge to empty my bowels was so strong, that I did not even have time to remove completely my underpants in the squatting toilet. **There was terrific deluge of liquid tarry stools mixed with blood, and it kept pouring out. I knew that I was in serious trouble, as this was a serious Hemorrhage and needed urgent hospitalization, but we were cut off, and there was no way any rescue could come to save me in time.** Even after washing the pan with mountain water, there was still the stain of blood. I felt much better in the abdomen, and went back to my bed where I laid down. I searched my medicine bag for emergency antacids and Zantac or Losec. Although I could find only Mucaine (an antacid), which is known to heal superficial erosions that can cause bleeding, I could not find any Zantac. With such a torrential hemorrhage, urgent transfusion was needed*

As I laid on the bed, I started to pray. I said "Lord Jesus, you said ask and you shall receive. Lord Jesus, you asked me to come to Lawe Deski to help the children and the poor people to rebuild their church and school buildings. I haven't finished the job yet. Tomorrow I have to see the children, the construction of the church and the school buildings, return back to see the Archbishops, and to bring medical aid and training here. Lord, Jesus, Please bring me home to Susie, Mother Mary, please protect me and bring me home to Susie. I said this three times, until exhausted I could only just whisper and say "Mother Mary...Jesus...please bring me home to Susie..." I continued with the rest of my Rosary and the Hail Mary's...and then started to palpate my abdomen, to try to arrive at a diagnosis. I knew that I did not have cirrhosis and varices because one month ago I had seen my own liver scan and it was normal. Could it be a cancerous lump in my stomach or intestines? I could find no lumps. My own conclusions were that this acute bleeding was due to acute erosions in the duodenum or just below it, and not stomach, as I would have vomited the blood out.

On deep prodding of the middle of my upper abdomen, I identified three finger points of tenderness which were not there before. Pressing the fingers firmly down, I prayed.

"Lord Jesus, Mother Mary, help me, I am in deep trouble and bleeding very badly. Lord Jesus, please go in through these three finger points, find the bleeding areas and stop them. Father, I ask this prayer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "Tired, I settled to whisper. " My Father, you who art in heaven.. You who have created me ...help me..help ...me...help me.."

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About a minute later, I prodded the three tender areas, and there was no more tenderness. Even harder pressure produced no discomfort. I wondered could this be true?

As I continued with “My Father... I saw the vision of Jesus and Mother Mary standing on His left side, and they were both smiling and very loving. Their communications were, “Don’t be afraid, I am bringing you home to Susie”...and the message continued “Don’t be afraid. I am bringing you home to Susie” and they both continued to smile lovingly.

Just then my mobile rang. There was an SMS message which had just got through from Susie. She asks “How are you? (I was not sure anyone in our group had contacted her.)

So I replied

“Groggy”. Jesus says He is bringing me home to Susie.

She replies “U mean U have upset stomach?”

I said “Yes”

She replies “Will boil bird nest soup for you and Sheng Fei”

I reply “Tun Tan” (Steam egg)

She replies, “Ask and U shall receive”

After that I switched off my mobile to conserve the battery.

I slept through the night, only to be troubled by mosquitoes buzzing over my right and left ears. Having failed to get rid of them by insect repellants, I said a prayer “Lord, help me to get some sleep and send these mosquitoes away” Mark would later say, when the mosquitoes left me, they went to him.

Saturday 25th March 2006

I woke up more refreshed. In the morning I had passed well formed tarry but less bloody stool. My companion commented that my face was pinker. I took a banana and some special supplements Jeannie gave me and mixed this with water from my flask. At 8.00am we celebrated the Feast day Mass of the Annunciation of our Lord. It was such a joy to see the 800 children aged from 8-15 years, in their uniform coming into the new church. They sang so loud and so passionately, especially at the end when we all sang the hymn to our Lady of Fatima. After that our team inspected the “Volcanic bomb shelter under the alter of the Church, which would be the Churches Communication Center (with the 20 second hand computers we would be sending to them) and a Malteser International would help to train.

*I found the walking around the 4 acre ground tiring and breathless, and had to make several stops. After cutting short our departure and receiving farewell Batik linen wear as a token of their love, affection and thanks, we left for the journey back to Medan. **Along the route I continued to say my Rosary.** At Brastafi, we stopped at 3.00pm and had lunch at the Mutiara Hotel, where I had Mushroom soup, Milo, and soup Meehoon.*

At 7.00pm we arrived at Medan, and went to eat durians at some of the best road stalls.

We stayed at the Tiara Medan Hotel.

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Sunday 26th March 2006

Throughout the night and before sleeping I said the Rosary, and prayed. “Lord Jesus, Mother Mary bring me home to Susie. When I read the Good News Bible, I read the section “Ask and you shall receive (Matthew 7, 7-13). Though weak, I drank some milo and took plain porridge. At the 10.00am Mass at the new Church of Velankanni, I gave my testimony to explain how God had saved me at Lawe Deski and had stopped the bleeding. Fr James gives me Holy water from the well which quenches my thirst.

At lunch, Fr Freitz Tambunan, Director of Caritas Medan gave us a farewell lunch and at 3.30pm we met Archbishop of Aceh and he thanks us for the help which we have given to his home town. At 8.20pm, we catch our SilkAir flight home, and arrive at 11.00pm. I immediately called my two Gastroenterologist colleagues but they were not contactable.

Susie and Anna were both at the airport to meet us. I was so happy to see Susie, and gave her a kiss and hug.

Monday 27th March 2006

My Consultant Surgeon and colleague Dr Ho Soon Teik, does an urgent gastroscopy on me, and finds six acute duodenal ulcers, which had stopped bleeding. As my blood pressure was low (BP 70 systolic), I was transfused with 3 liters of dextrose saline, and my younger brother Dr.Oon Chong Hau was called in by Susie to co- manage my blood pressure, and diabetes. Amazingly not only was my blood pressure controlled

without medications, but even my diabetes improved. They estimated that I had lost 5 pints of blood, as my Hb had fallen from 14Gms to 9.0Gms/L

Both Soon Teik and Chong Hau told me if my Hb was less than 9 Gms/(normal is . 13.6 – 17.) I would need to be transfused. When it came back as 9.2 I agreed to be transfused, and drowsily watched the precious blood going down the drip and in the prayer of Simeon “Lord, you can let your servant close his eyes, for I have seen the Glory of your Salvation” (Luke2,29-32).

In the quietness of the VIP room which the hospital had placed me, my nursing colleagues, doctors, and Susie’s special chicken soups and fish porridge helped and nursed me to back to recovery.

My specialists colleagues who saw me said “It is not possible. None of your medicines ,like mucaine will stop the bleeding or heal the acute bleeding ulcers. Also alcohol is contraindicated for gastrointestinal bleeding”. I replied. “God saved me!” They were awed and amazed.

As I reflected many times in the solitude of prayer and thanksgiving, I cried many times for that precious gift of life from God, my Father, and remembered what Elizabeth(after the Annunciation) had said to Mary “ Blessed are you who believes that what God had promised would come true !”(Luke 1,45).

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I was discharged on the Thurs 30th March 2006. I would need a re scope in one month to see whether these acute ulcers have healed.

Addendum

28th April 2006. I have my stomach re-scoped again by my surgical colleague, Dr.Ho Soon Teik. All the erosion areas had healed completely without any signs of remnants or chronicity. My blood pressure was now 110/70mm, fasting blood glucose 78mg%, and a glicosylate Hb 5.3,and Hb 13.3Gms/dl, showing my health had recovered.

Thanks be to God. “I will always thank the Lord. I will never stop praising Him. I will praise Him for what He has done.”(Psalm 34) The effects of God’s loving act, was so awesome that I was unable to repeat or tell the story for a year without crying. I have no further trouble from my stomach and the ulcers have been healed for the last two years. Praise God!

8 September2010. Feast day of the birthday of our Lady, (also known as our Lady of Filerme, Patroness of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John , of Rhodes, and of Malta, in brief the Order of Malta .

I have been a Chancellor of the Order of Malta for two years. How did this membership and the Lawedesky Mission affect me?

It has brought me ever so close to the Lord, my God. Every day I say the Scriptural Rosary, refreshing myself with the complete life of Jesus, and the God Man, from His annunciation and birth to his Death and resurrection. Every day I go the Eucharist at Mass, to be in intimate closeness to my Lord, and God.

In March 2005 I was invited to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion(ECM) at our Parish Church of St. Ignatius by our leader, Martin Koh. I serve in the week day 6pm and the Saturday Sunset Mass, and take on cover duties for those who are not able to serve. In the 26 June on the Feast Day of the Solemnity of Body and Blood of

our Lord, I was appointed to be the leader of the Sunset Mass , bringing the Holy Eucharist to nearly 1,000 parishioners .

10 minutes before the Eucharistic Mass, I would lead with a prayer with our 9 ECMs. We say this prayer.

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" Dear and loving Father , as we stand before your sacred altar, we shall serve the body and blood of your beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ, with deep reverence and love . We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen"

, I was also invited to serve as Lector as well as Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion , at our Catholic Prayer Society to help the lunch time Catholics and visitors .

I felt greatly humbled at these invitations to serve my Lord's body and blood to ' those who seek Him, those who do not know Him, and to those searching for Him"

I had always been a doubter of the transubstantiation of the host(the unleavened bread) to become the body of our Lord , and had been to many places to see the miracles of the Eucharistic host, from Lanciano in Italy(AD 700) to Santarem , Portugal, and to Siena, Italy. I asked "How can an unleavened bread , become the Body and blood of the Godman, Jesus Christ?"

At Lawedesky, I was saved by the loving hand of God. I should have bled and died there, having lost about 5 pints of blood, yet the bleeding stopped after I had taken the body and blood of Christ, at the two Masses, the first on the Friday night , and the second, the next day.

*My experience at Lawedesky in Aceh continued to prompt me to serve "My Lord" with great humility, awe, and deep reverence. As I shared my experience with Fr. John Wong Wong OFM, Regional Superior of the Franciscans, and many parishioners, friends, believers and non believers , I say to them " I was a non believer in the Eucharistic transubstantiation, **but God said to me " I ll show you"!***

Jesus said " Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and live in him . Unless , you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will not have life." (John 6, 54-58)

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*The Lord's Supper (Matthew 26, 26-30). Jesus, the Godman consecrates his Passover meal using his body, as he says when he passed the broken bread round to his disciples " **This is my body; take it and eat it.**" Then he took the cup of wine and said " **This is my blood, shed to seal the new and everlasting covenant for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in memory of me"***

On the 5 August 2011, my surgical colleague, Dr. Ho Soon Teik did a gastroscopy, as I had complained of some eructation and nocturnal heartburn. He found that the six old antral and jejunal ulcers had healed completely, with only a trace of surface scarring. An insignificant hiatus hernia was found, and no active disease was found. Praise the Lord. At Mass that evening, I gave thanks to God.

Every day, I give thanks to God for the precious gift of life. To the many cancer patients, regardless of religion, agnostics, or even atheists, whom I see, I ask them to treasure every second of every day for that gift of life, given to us so freely by God.

Every day, I do my scriptural rosary treasuring every moment of the life of Jesus, as my mind wonders over the many holy sites which I had visited in the Holy Land.

Each day at the sunset Mass, I listen to the Word of God, and as a humble Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, I serve the Body and blood of our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ, with deep reverence, to the many who come in the queue, or I bring Holy Communion to the sick in hospital, as we share Bible and faith stories.

As I reflected on this, I looked at a sketch I had drawn in 1997, and now hanging before me. Fr. Simon Tan, our Retreat Director of our Novena RCIA (Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults) had asked us to draw what God wants you to do. My sketch of many people of all walks of life, some in crutches, others in stretchers, some crawling...but we were all going up a hill, where on top was the glory of the crucified Christ...and the Word said "Here I am Lord". This was the same vision that I had seen in a retreat with Fr. Gino Henriques CsSR in 2003, when he asked us to describe what was God calling you to do. God had said "Bring my people back to me"

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Addendum

Pictures of the Lawedesky, Aceh Mission is seen in the photo section of the website.

When we first went to Lawedesky on the 5 March 2004, this was soon after the Asian Tsunami, with the underwater massive earthquake on the west coast at Meulaboh. Aceh was then in a state of rebellion between the rebels and the Government forces, and we had to obtain a special permit to enter Aceh. Fortunately, the relationship between the Catholics and the Moslem was very warm, and we were welcomed to help their school and church buildings. Water was pumped down from mountain springs and the countryside is very agricultural. The roadway was pot holed and the roadside littered with fallen trees and telegraphic poles. Our HUV and six persons aboard, consisted of a local engineer, an accountant (George Thia) from our side, an architect (Mark Chin), and once out of Medan our mobile phones were sporadic, because of the poor receptions.

After construction and repair of the Church, and the school buildings, we also built an underground bomb shelter below the altar. This was to protect some of the inhabitants from 'volcanic firebombs'. As one of the teachers, knew Computers, we later in 2007, sent them six reconditioned computers, so that they could have communication in case of another disaster. We also arranged for Malteser International to provide first aid training for the villagers. In 2009, we helped them to build an artesian well for clean drinking waters for the villagers. Companions of our Order help to refurbish the church with their needs.

