

A Pastor's Zeal to Serve The People

"If you simply have Our Lord in your heart, you will never be afraid of anything!...I felt like my heart was bleeding as I looked upon the wreckage of my parish that has centuries of history and where I have served so many years. I could have stayed there crying...I am trying to visit all my parishioners before the feast of the Assumption, to strengthen them in their faith." These were the simple words of a priest, Father JIANG Tian Xiang, pastor of the parish in Xiu Shui, located 40 kilometers from the epicenter of the earthquake that hit the area on May 12. The priest has been sleeping for almost a month in a small car in order to keep watch over the remains of his beloved Church and to be near the faithful and the inhabitants of the area.

When the earthquake took place, he was in Beijing for an On-going Formation course. As soon as he heard the news, he went back to the parish without even knowing whether or not the road would be intact. Three days later, he found himself standing in front of his Church, now reduced to rubble. The pastor encountered an elderly member of the parish who had been keeping guard over the Church day and night. Fr. JIANG asked him, *"Weren't you afraid that there would be aftershocks and you would be here alone?"*. The man told him: *"If you simply have Our Lord in your heart, you will never be afraid of anything."* Impressed by the man's words, Fr. JIANG took them as his motto in his own commitment.

When the journalists and the volunteers from JINDE CHARITY saw the situation, they asked him if he would like to leave the area, but he always responded with the same answer: "I am not going anywhere. I should guarantee daily Mass for my people who come from a long-ways' away. And it always rains? Well, my clothes dry off from my body heat. What do I eat? Whatever nature provides. I have never felt unwell, thanks be to God. I just have to cover the food when I cook, otherwise the cats, dogs, and even the pigs steal it from me. But they are also good company," Fr. JIANG said. "50 days after the earthquake, it was my 43rd birthday, and I thanked the Lord with a Mass, entrusting the reconstruction work to Him. That same day, I was visited by the JINDE CHARITY volunteers. They brought me food, tents, wood. After loading up everything, wiping the sweat off my face with a tissue, I was suddenly inspired to say, *"Thank you Lord! What a beautiful birthday gift you have given me! Who said that earthquakes only have negative consequences?" We should look at the people who never came together and are now coming together, the people who had forgotten the faith and are returning. We owe everything to the Lord.*" Today, thanks to the seminarians and volunteers of JINDE CHARITY, Fr. JIANG has a small tent where he can take cover from the rain and continue rebuilding his community.

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