



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

Testimony of Sister Annie Demerjian, Aleppo (Syria)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

At the beginning of my speech, I am delighted to greet you with my sincere appreciation for your kind invitation to hear a life testimony from my wounded and beloved Syria. I am here carrying with me the suffering of a people that has lasted for more than 6 years; years of pain, deprivation, and lack of human dignity. I wonder what is happening today to the enduring moral and humanitarian principles in the world, when we see on our television screens hundreds and thousands of unarmed civilians in Syria crushed by war. Will nothing touch the human conscience in front of these scenes?

We see the years pass as if they were a long Way of the Cross whose different stages did not end yet, and everyone along this Way eagerly awaiting the end of darkness and the dawn of hope, a hope which is the dawn of resurrection bringing the peace of Christ.

Years of pain and suffering; it is as if the cries of the Lord from the cross were repeated: "My God my God why have you forsaken me?" These are the screams of a mother who has lost her husband or one of her sons: "My God my God, why have you forsaken us?"

This war has stunned the eyes of children, and in a flash their innocence has been extinguished by adult conflicts. This is the case of the children of Syria, who have become victims at an early age when they should have been happy in their early years. When this crisis entered its seventh year it stole their childhood and become a path that has led them to pain, ignorance and isolation. The emerging generation in Syria faces the danger of being lost because of the spiral of violence. So, here we are, faced with the hysterical screams of children filled with terror and horrified by the sounds of shells and bombs and bullets flying through the air filling the corners of collapsed houses.

The wailing of children who have lost years of innocence and childhood, and lost the best years of their lives; children who have lost their homes and are looking for shelter in what has become a scene of destruction and murder, not like in the scene of a film presented by television, but for these children, this is the reality of life. Thus they are without a future, a present or an identity.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

More than 6 million Syrian children live in desperate conditions. Schooling has become impossible for 2.5 million of them. This is because of the destruction of educational facilities on the one hand, and the transfer of others to shelters for displaced persons or military headquarters. Schools have been closed in areas controlled by extremist religious groups such as Daesh and others, where education is restricted to material that serves the ideology of extremism and exclusion.

Despite the negative effects on all members of the Syrian society, the children remain the most affected victims. What they are witnessing will leave them with the consequences of psychological and health problems that will manifest themselves in the form of social diseases that will control the future of generations even after the cessation of violence.

Despite all the circumstances surrounding us, we are confident and have faith that this silent God is suffering with us and for us; He is suffering silently and suffering sadly. "It is not my will, but thy will be done."

Your will is not war, violence and destruction. Your will is the salvation of every human being, even if he is a murderer. The absence of God from peoples' souls is what led to war, destruction and murder.

How many times have I stood in silence...? I pray to God in my inner room, wondering why, why, Lord, why cannot man live in peace with his fellow man?

The answer that comes is: the absence of God makes man think only of himself and his interest. This is the case in countries that have turned God away from the scene and run their own affairs in accordance with their interests without thinking about the results of their decisions that may affect peoples all over the earth.

The situation for Syrians in asylum countries is no different from that of the Syrians who remain inside Syria because they are trying to escape from one type of death to another death, whether they are drowning in the sea in a desperate attempt to reach safer countries or by suicide, which has become a common phenomenon and widespread among young men who have very few options except perhaps staying inside Syria and fighting with one of the warring parties.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

Or they could wait for the end of the war with all the terrible economic, social and security conditions. Or they could resort to fleeing to a neighboring country of Syria, or to the European countries for what they provide for refugees and which have become the target of many refugees, waiting for the end of the war and access to news of death through social networking sites.

For more than six years we have lived with our people in what has passed as a long night. How do you feel in a country where electricity is absent and the darkness and the light of the candle have become the companion of the family while the rest of the countries enjoy their great well-being? I will not forget the days and nights we spent in the darkness. Days when we carried candles in one hand and our prayer books in another.

Over the course of more than six years of the (so called) Syrian revolution, the damage to the water infrastructure in Syria has been enormous. Several parties have caused this, and many consequences occur from the targeting of water sources in the battle. Consequences causing the thirst of millions of Syrians, the spread of epidemics and diseases due to water pollution, not to mention the shrinking area of land under irrigation by 49%, and the decline in the number of reservoirs.

How do you feel in a country cut off from water and watching the quest of the elderly, the mother or child, coming every day, searching and carrying the water under the sun and the cold, just to provide the barest minimum of water possible, while other people enjoy the abundance of water?

When water was banned from many Syrian areas, civilians were forced to search for other sources of water, sometimes by buying water from unknown sources and sometimes by drilling artesian wells. This resulted in untreated drinking water, which led to water pollution diseases such as acute diarrhea, intestinal inflammation, poisoning, and gastrointestinal infections. I remember how many times we spent taking our bath with only a pot of water, and days when we had only a few bottles of water.

The shells of fear and death, as they became known, increased the sorrow of the Syrians; they were an extra worry to their many other concerns. The color of the streets walls became discolored with the many announcements of the deaths of martyrs and other victims who died, victims of all different categories. The missiles do not distinguish between a child and an elderly person, a man or a woman from here or from there. At times there was uncertainty among residents about the continued bombardment in specific



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

places. I cannot describe the fear and panic as we run in the streets to reach safe places from these shells, all of which has left psychological and physical wounds in the thousands of helpless Syrian people.

I will not forget too many friends who were taken away by the war, and their faces are still in front of my eyes. Many nights we would come out of our rooms and meet in a safe room to pray or just sit very silently.

You cannot imagine how we spent the wintertime: the nights passed as if we were in a swamp of icy water. For days I was going to bed shivering from the cold because of the lack of fuel to warm up even a corner of the house, and so it was or my sisters, nuns and every house in the city.

Children came to school with their hands swollen from the cold; old people tried to move to another place because of the extreme frost, their slender bodies trembling from the cold.

I will never forget looking out of the window overlooking the street before going to pray early, and seeing dozens of families with their bags leaving the town while they say farewell to their relatives with tears pouring out of their eyes and the pain pressing their hearts, I could not stop my tears and I feel my heart broken.

How painful and sad when we see young people say farewell to their friends who were kidnapped by the hand of death or who have gone to another country.

I remember a little boy who was crying every day and who said to his mother, "We have to leave because I want to be with my friends".

Despite this, the people who cried out "my God my God why did you leave me", did not give up. Their sad cries mingled with hope and full surrender to God. They said "Let your will be done, O my God ..."

In this context, our youth has been a source of strength that rejects all kinds of humiliation. Their insistence on going onward despite all the dangers especially when the missiles fall like rainstorms, they wait for a while or for days with patience, steadfastness and courage and then carry on their lives and activities. When we were working at school, I was surprised by the strength of determination that our students showed.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

When our school was affected by the events, we moved to share with another school in the afternoon, and at 4 p.m. it begins to get dark in winter. We were surprised to see that even our youngest students, aged four and five years, took out their lamps and continued reading their lesson.

Yes, they have lost their most basic rights. They have lost their childhood, but this generation that has lived through war and hardship will be a generation that challenges the difficulties and rebuilds its country.

The trust in God, which is rooted in this strong faith, is found in believers. Despite all the fear we live in, they go to the churches to pray and find rest for their souls with the Comforter Lord who gives them strength and endurance.

It is enough to hear their repeated words after receiving the support "Thanks be to God." All of which indicates a mark of trust that the crucified God who is with us and for us and will not leave us.

Here lies the question: We are in an age when man is able to access the latest developments and discoveries, yet he has not succeeded in reaching a peaceful coexistence in which individuals live in justice and peace.

Here, allow me to express from the bottom of my heart a word of thanks and appreciation for all the good people who have extended their generous hands with good deeds and their great souls by giving to the needy and the poor, especially to every member of ACN (the Church's aid and all donors)... I felt that I was among my brothers and sisters and it amazed me the way you work and your love for the suffering people.

I would like to say to you that all the words of thanks are not enough, but God, who sees what you do, will reward you for this, because you have wiped away the tears of thousands of those who suffer. And the words of thanks I will raise with all the Syrian people as prayer acceptable to God asking Him to bless the tirelessness of your love and your stand with us.

I also thank you for inviting me to share with you the joy, and the joy of the world, in the appearance of the Virgin Mary one hundred years ago, and for the 70 years of the establishment of Aid to the Church in Need.

Yes, I would like to thank our Virgin Mother, who was at the feet of the Crucified Christ, weeping for her only Son. She is the one who lived and knew the meaning of pain, the meaning of homelessness and deprivation, the meaning of fear and anxiety ... She is also with her Son crying over our pains



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Testimony – Pilgrimage Fatima 2017

... You are our tender mother. We ask you to ask your Son to give us peace and safety.

I pray with you today and ask the Lord to grant our rulers the wisdom to govern the country with justice and peace.

I pray with you today and from this blessed place, in our world in pain, that our God will heal it from all violence and destruction and allow us a bright resurrection dawn full of justice and peace.

Thank you for your love and support.

Sister Annie Demerjian RJM

Sister Annie had to cancel her presence in Fatima, but she had sent her testimony in advance.