



“Take courage, all you people of the land; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts,”

(Hag 2:4)

August 6th, 2017

Feast of Transfiguration

Dear brothers, sisters and friends,

It has been three years since we were displaced and you have been accompanying us through your prayers to endure the days of turmoil. During these years, we cried, screamed, wondered, questioned God and our faith and also laughed and found moments of hope, love and gratefulness to our Lord, the church and all individuals who supported us in so many different ways. On August 6th 2014, we entered a tunnel that we did not know when we would get out of it. In fact, some days we thought we would never see the light. Three years ago we left our homes at night to the unknown. We started a journey of displacement, exile and questioning. But, to speak the truth, despite everything, we always dreamed of going back and finding our houses safe and sound, just as we left them. We strongly wished that we would return and kindle our candles for prayers, harvest our grapes, and read our books. We hoped even when we knew that it was our neighbors who betrayed us and did us harm even before ISIS did.

That was the case until the fall of 2016, when Iraqi forces started the military operations to liberate the Plain of Nineveh. God showered us with His graces as our towns were liberated one after the other; ISIS was defeated and the Plain of Nineveh seems to have been liberated.

When we first visited our Christian towns, we were so much stunned by the damage we saw. It was badly painful to see all that overwhelming destruction. We immediately realized that it was not the military forces or smart weapons that caused all that damage, but hate. Hate leaves both oppressed and oppressor deeply wounded. Only God knows how much love we need to heal these deep wounds.

Walking sluggishly in our Christian towns we wondered remembering the word of God to prophet Ezekiel, ““Son of man, can these bones live?”” and we found ourselves answering him ““Sovereign LORD, you alone know,”” (Ezekiel 37:3). Inspired by the stories and experiences of Biblical characters, we believe that God is able to raise us again in a new way.

Today we see the marvelous work of God. There are some signs of hope. The rebuilding process although slow, but it has started and some families have returned to their homes. In Batnaia, a town that was 90% destroyed, a process of cleaning has started. To Telskuf and Qaraqush, Christian towns, some families have returned and there are families returning every week. There are over 600 families today in Telskuf and 450 in Qaraqush. Telskuf was much less destroyed than Qaraqush. Although in



Qaraqush the amount of destruction is estimated to be 30%, rebuilding is not easy and the NGOs that have afforded to help with rebuilding are not enough compared to the destruction. There are 7000 home in Qaraqush and 2400 of them are completely burned and another 4400 are partly burned and destroyed, there are 116 house completely destroyed. The hope is to repair as many houses as possible before the beginning of the school year in September, but of course there is a problem with the funding. So far only the church and some NGOs are doing the rebuilding.

Our sisters are back to Telskuf and we hope to find a place by the beginning of the year and will start a kindergarten. Soon also we will return to Qaraqush. Since our convent in Qaraqush is partially destroyed, we repaired a family home for us to live in it until we move back to our convent. Also, the orphanage was totally burned but we found a place for the sisters and girls to move too in Qaraqush.

As you probably already have heard, Mosul has been liberated, but the amount of destruction is overwhelming in every field. It will take years to be fixed, but there is nothing impossible with God. Of course, it is not easy to decide whether to go back to Mosul or not. Some people still try to understand what the will of God is -if ISIS is defeated that does not mean that the Plain of Nineveh is entirely cleansed from that mentality. However, we as community decided to return with our people; and pray and hope all people will have the courage to go back to their hometowns and be able to start from the beginning again. God is with us and will not leave us.

We thank you for all the support you have shown us. Please pray for us as we start this new phase of our lives.

Know of our gratitude and prayers for you.



Shrine of prophet Nahum Alqush- Iraq. Photo by Frdos Zora, op