

Hosman, in the Advent season 2015

*Dear friends,*

Church service was hardly over when the altar candle had disappeared, and that was not for the first time. What a strange consequence of prayer, I thought, as I sat at supper with the hungry flock of children. It was getting late and the little ones had to leave. No street lamps were lit, so I accompanied them to the Roma settlement. We stumbled through the dark alleys, the more courageous ones running ahead. I wanted to turn back at the old mill, but big Florin pulled me onwards: „Come to Zabar, he wants to talk with you.“ Oh dear, he needs money again, I thought, and would gladly have avoided that. Florin read my thoughts: „No, no, today is his birthday.“ Well, now I would have liked to congratulate him, but I had no present along.

We entered Zabar’s hut. And there my birthday present already was: our altar candle lit the room! A multitude sat crowded together on a mattress and on the floor, nibbling sunflower seeds. An extended family: grandfather, Zabar and his brother with their wives and many children. Sina, who had attended the service with us, wanted to blow out the candle straight away, but Zabar was quicker and restrained her. While we sang the Romanian birthday song – May you live for many years! – I glanced at the walls and the ceiling. The moon was now shining through the plastic sheeting which covered the holes in the roof. Would this hut survive the next few years? Not even the coming winter!

The very next rainfall caused a clay wall to break down. Zabar was looking for help. I promised him that we would repair the damage together. The lads in our workshop all lent a hand. But the wall was beyond repair, and the hut threatened to collapse completely. A new house with two rooms would have to be built. We procured tools, bricks and other building materials. During the following weeks our handymen guided the many helpers on the building site. Even Sina took part: „I’ll find candles so that we can light the hut at night.“

Sina and her little brother had parked themselves on Zabar when their parents had disappeared one day. As a thank you, Sina brings things from the village home with her: scrounged bread, milk from the farmers, a few branches from the forest for the wood stove. „If you come to music school again, we'll give you some candles to take along“, Florin promised her. Sina loves to sing, but lately she has always had something else to do – so that she can stay with Zabar.

This year, the large family will celebrate Christmas in their new house. And Sina will bring the candles. Not only that one house, the whole village will seem brighter. Even though many houses still await repairs, and many children still need a home.

Dear friends, you help us build little weatherproof houses for children. Not only houses of stone or brick, but also houses of learning and security.

May the light shine so brightly that it lights up your families on Christmas Eve. Together with the ELIJAH community, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart.

*Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*