

Nou, Advent 2019

Dear friends,

The „Street of the Living“: that is how I understood the name of the “strada viilor” which follows the banks of the stream in Nou. To me, the designation sounded cynical – I might have thought “strada mortilor”, Street of the Dead, more apt. Later I learned that one could also translate it as “Street of Vines”. They say that good wines grew here at the time of the Transylvanian Saxons. Then the Roma were resettled here and built their clay huts. It was a dismal street to walk through, sinking into the mud. It was full of dirt and garbage, scraggy dogs and pure destitution pounced on us at every turn.

In the last few years, the Strada Viilor has changed considerably. Some inhabitants have found work and are able to build, stone by stone, a new little house – with two rooms at the most. The construction work takes years. Small children run over the whole place, more and more attend school. My heart rejoices because I hear how children practise their instruments even outside our music school. Scales and melodies sound from the houses into the street. A zest for life and a sense of a new start have moved into the Roma quarter.

But then we visit Adriana. She was one of the first ones who joined in our project “Clean Village”. Then aged seventeen, always in good humour, she led a troop of women who picked up the garbage in the village daily. In the meantime, Adriana married and has five children. Her husband is a day labourer on a construction site. The children sit on a bed in the small room with their grandmother and a neighbour. Adriana paces the room, as restless as a caged animal. The half-filled plastic pouch which she is holding catches the liquid from her kidney. Eight months pregnant with her youngest child, she had acute pains. An emergency delivery was induced and they found cervical cancer. Operations followed and one kidney had to be removed. After a year the fight against the devilish disease had been lost and she was sent home from the hospital.

The doctors attempt to ease the pain with morphine patches, but I can see from her contorted features that they are in vain. Her mother says she has come to help, and will stay as long as ... she doesn't say it. Her hands drop helplessly. Adriana bears her illness with fortitude but she is not long for this world. Who will care for the children? "On no account will my husband leave them in a state institution, they will stay with him." He will drop them off at our new Social Centre "Casa Martin" on his way to work and pick them up again in the evening. We say the Lord's Prayer together. Then we say good-bye. For ever?

Despondently we walk up to the village centre, to the "Casa Martin". Through the nursery into the kindergarten, into the classrooms where the pupils are doing their homework. The house sparkles with life and energy, the boys' dark faces laugh at us cheekily, the girls are writing eagerly. In the kitchen, the cook is preparing the vegetables for lunch. From the showers comes the sound of splashing water, soon clean and fragrant children will emerge.

Maybe it is really a street of the living. Here Adriana's children will find some consolation and a home.

Here joy, there desperation. How am I to connect that? How can one stand it?

As Mary did in Bethlehem: she pondered all in her heart.

Dear friends, I wish you and your families that the light of Christmas may outshine the heavy burdens and the light ones.

Thank you for letting us pass your gifts onwards!

*Thank you for your confidence
Fr. Georg Sporschill SJ*

