

Risking **Everything** for Christ



Fr. Luis Montes, IVE

Fr. Luis Montes, IVE, was born in a little town in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the sixth of seven brothers. Three are priests in the Institute of the Incarnate Word (IVE). “My brother Jose is a priest in Ukraine. My brother Enrique is in Egypt. I am in Iraq.” ■ Within months after his 1996 ordination as a priest in the IVE’s contemplative branch, Fr. Luis was sent to a town outside of Bethlehem to help found a monastery there. “It is thought that this was the place where King Solomon wrote the Song of Songs,” he says. “It was a beautiful valley full of water, full of beautiful trees.” ■ A providential place to fall in love with the people of the Middle East. ■ Through the years, Father has also



Fr. Luis with his parishioners.

served in Jordan and Egypt, but the people of Iraq hold a special place in his heart. ■ After the 2003 invasion and war in Iraq, the number of Iraqi Christians went from 1.5 million to about 200,000. “The country was suffering more or less 20 terrorist attacks every day in Baghdad,” he says. “We’re speaking about thousands of martyrs, hundreds of thousands of refugees. It was not uncommon that terrorists would enter into Christian houses during the night and kill everyone in the family, from the elders to the babies.” ■ While many Christians died or fled, those who remain in Baghdad today continue to risk everything for Christ. ■ “In our parish, we don’t have the freedom to do whatever we want so we do everything inside, no processions outside and not a lot of things. The parishioners have to be very careful. Also, the main day for activities is Friday, not Sunday. Because Sunday is a day of work.” ■ Yet even in the midst of their own struggles, Fr. Luis and his parishioners are helping 70 Syrian Catholic and Orthodox families who have



Celebrating Mass for Syrian and Orthodox families.

come to Baghdad seeking refuge after losing everything in ISIS attacks up north. ■ “This makes a special relationship between these families and our church. We are visiting them in the refugee camp. We are consoling them, listening to their problems, trying to find help for them.” ■ “Father says this experience in Baghdad is “a great one”. ■ “I see more joy in these refugee camps sometimes than in the cities of the West,” he says. “We see the devil’s work trying to destroy the Church, but at the same time, we see how God gives strength to the weakest. These Christians, they are giving us a great lesson about how it’s worth it to serve Jesus Christ. How it is worth it to die because of him, how life is short. And we have to use the little time we have to be saints.”

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