

## **Interreligious Experiences in Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast**

There are several religions in Burkina Faso: Catholicism, Protestantism, traditionalism, Islam and many others. It is possible for these religions to co-exist in urban areas as well as in rural ones. Within the same family, we meet Christians, Muslims and Protestants who live their faith with respect (for one another). Such is my situation, where we meet Muslims, and Catholic and Protestant Christians. In the morning, it is very beautiful to see how each one seeks God's face. While some are heading for the Mosque, others head for the Church. While I was on holidays in July, I felt and even experienced the mutual help that is lived among us.

I wish to share a little story with you that I lived within my family.

During my holidays, I also went to the Ivory Coast to visit relatives living in this West African country. It was my first visit, so it was difficult for me to situate myself. As soon as I arrived, my family's concern was how I would get to Mass and to which church I would go. But one of my uncles made plans to accompany me early the next morning after the five o'clock service at the Mosque. I had set my alarm for four thirty in time to get ready before church. To my great surprise, my aunt woke me up at four to take my shower and wait for my uncle to come back at five for Mass. I got ready and waited for him.

Indeed, he was there at five o'clock – but with other information. After his prayer at the Mosque, he had inquired from Christian neighbors about the time of Mass. We finally left the house somewhat late, so we walked very fast, he in front in his Muslim attire, and I running behind him. From time to time he would repeat: "Let us go faster, we are late!" After a 30 minute walk, we came to the main door of the parish church. He took me by the hand and led me straight towards the parish chapel. He went right to the door and told me: "You can go in here – and take your time. As for me, I will wait for you outside."

After Mass, he took me by the hand once more and introduced me to the parish priest, then asked him for the daily mass schedule.

From this experience and many others, I see that we are truly on the right road to fruitful relationships, to accepting one another and our differences.

I also had the opportunity to spend the two Muslim holy days in my family: the Ramadan which is celebrated after 30 days of fasting, and the Tabaski, also referred to as the feast of the sheep where each family slaughters a sheep. This feast alludes to Abraham's sacrifice. These feasts are characterized by testimonies (evidence) of fellowship and solidarity from which an atmosphere of mutual sharing and esteem is born:

- the sharing of dishes (special meals)
- mutual visits between Muslims and those of other religions
- dancing for everyone

I wish to point out that Christians do the same thing on the Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter, which, among others, are visible signs of interreligious dialogue.

Furthermore, family ties are stronger than religious ties in Burkina Faso, and the interreligious experience is possible thanks to our mentality. Before being Catholic, Muslim or Protestant, the other is my sister, my brother, my cousin, my niece, my nephew, my mom, my dad, my uncle: we are all the same family.

Personally, I thank God for God's presence in the midst of all these interreligious relationships. I ask God to radically transform us so that in the future, we will feel more truly as instruments promoting this dialogue.

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December 2016