

## 2013 CIB Conference Meeting in Brazil

### Travel log by Sister Mary John Mananzan, Part Two

September 10 – 14

#### RIO DE JANEIRO

After a long, exhausting trip with interesting side-trips to the Aparecida Shrine and the tourist city of Campos de Jordao, we arrived at the Amaro College, run by our Sisters (of Tutzing) here. Amado is actually Maurus, the brother of St. Placid. They have a grade school and high school about 300 plus students.

The first thing we did the next day was of course visit the two most popular places in Rio de Janeiro—the Sugar Loaf Mountain and the Corcovado. It was a bit misty so we went to Sugar Loaf Mountain first. It is so named because it resembles the bread known as pan de azucar. We had to take a cable car to go up there. There are two peaks actually. In the first one, we had a glimpse of the city of Rio but still through mist. But we enjoyed taking photos of the small monkeys that went flying from the branches of some small trees. Then we rode another cable car to the higher peak. There we went to the museum which showed the history of the cable car. I find it quite an inspiring story because it is the story of a man who had a dream, who as an Engineer used his technical know how to fulfill that dream was credible enough to convince people to contribute to the realization of his dream. This man was Augusto Ferreira Ramos. People thought he was crazy to even dream of such a thing as a car flying from the earth to the peak of the rocks. When one is on top, one cannot but echo what Charles Darwin said on his visit: Nothing can be more striking than the effect of these huge rounded masses of naked rock rising out of the most luxuriant vegetation.

From the Sugar Loaf we visited the Benedictine Fathers who have a huge monastery also on top of a hill—it is also called Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat and is the third Benedictine Monastery in Brazil built in 1590. We made history because according to the monks, we were the first women to enter their refectory in 400 years!!! They put a long table in the middle of the refectory and the monks were all around us. They were just beginning their General Chapter. It was a good meal with salad, fruits, beef stroganoff, turkey, all kinds of wine and sumptuous dessert of ice cream and chilled compote of pears. They even gave us a mini-concert with the monks in aprons (wonderful rare sight) who were our servers also forming the choir. Their church is baroque to the nth degree like an over decorated cake. It is not my kind of Church but it is a tourist spot here. They also have two huge libraries where they restoring old rare books.

From the Abbey we went with our van to the Corcovado which was like going to Baguio with sharp hairpin turns. At a certain point we all had to transfer to the company vans that brought us to at the very foot of the giant statue of Christ which is 38 meters high and was voted one of the new 7 wonders of the world on July 7,

2007. **Corcovado**, meaning "[hunchback](#)" in [Portuguese](#), <sup>[1]</sup> is a mountain in central [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil](#). The 710-metre (2,329 ft) [granite](#) peak is located in the [Toluca Forest](#), a national park. **Christ the Redeemer** ([Portuguese](#): *Cristo Redentor*, standard is a statue of [Jesus Christ](#) in [Rio de Janeiro](#), Brazil; considered the largest [Art Deco](#) statue in the world and the [5th largest](#) statue of Jesus in the world. It is 30 meters (98 ft) tall, not including its 8 meters (26 ft) pedestal, and its arms stretch 28 meters (92 ft) wide.<sup>[1]</sup> It weighs 635 [tons](#) (625 [long](#), 700 [short tons](#))

Again it is the story of people who dreamt big and who effectively fulfilled their dream. It began with the dream of a parish priest Fr. Pedro Maria Boss who requested financing from [Princess Isabel](#) to build a large religious [monument](#). Princess Isabel did not approve of the idea and it was dismissed in 1889, the second proposal for a [landmark](#) statue on the mountain was made in 1920 by the lay organization, Catholic Circle of Rio.<sup>[7]</sup> The group organized an event called *Semana do Monument* ("Monument Week") to attract donations and collect signatures to support the building of the statue. Local engineer [Heitor da Silva Costa](#) designed the statue; it was sculpted by [Polish-French](#) sculptor [Paul Landowski](#).<sup>[9]</sup> Construction took nine years, from 1922 to 1931 and cost the equivalent of US\$250,000 (\$3,200,000 in 2013). The monument was opened on October 12, 1931. There were a lot of people and it was quite a feat taking pictures because of the glare of the sun. Some people actually lay down on their backs to take pictures. The view of Rio is quite magnificent on all sides. Of course not everyone knows that the view down there included stretches of favelas (slum districts) supposedly the biggest in the world. A new addition which we welcome is the small chapel in honor of Our Lady of Aparecida built at the base of the statue. It was wonderful sitting there and listening to piped in Gregorian chant sang by monks.

On our way home we passed by the famous beaches (imagine having beaches right in the center of a city!) While passing the Ipanema beach Mother Martha Lucia and Sr. Mary Jane sang the song Girl from Ipanema in Portuguese and in English. Then we slowed down at the most famous beach in the world—the Copacabana. We were told that right in front of the Windsor Hotel was erected the 8 meter high altar where Pope Francis said the last Mass to 3 million people gathered at the beach!

## PETROPOLIS

When you hear the word, you think of a grand city with big squares, palaces, etc. Actually it is the summer imperial residence so it is a pleasant mountain town with elegant houses and two palaces but not the grandiose place you might imagine. We had a one day tour of this beautiful place beginning with a visit to the Benedictine monastery—Mosteiro de Virgem Maria- Monastery of the Virgin Mary. There are 23 nuns there. They have a simple but beautiful chapel also decorated by the famous artist Augusto Patros who constructed and decorated the Shrine of the Aparecida. We had a mass with the Bishop of Bahia who later on gave us a tour of the Cathedral of St. Peter of Alcantara. The church houses the Imperial mausoleum which has the remains of Former Emperor [D. Pedro II](#), Empress [Teresa Cristina](#),

[Isabel, Princess Imperial of Brazil](#) and [Prince Gaston, Count of Eu](#), in addition to the tombs of [Pedro de Alcântara, Prince of Grão-Pará](#) and his wife [Countess Elisabeth Dobržensky de Dobřenicz](#),

From there we visited the museum which was the summer imperial palace. It is a typical castle with salons, and bedrooms, and concert halls, I took note of the beautiful golden pen which the Imperial Princess Isabel signed the document which freed the slaves and ended slavery in Brazil. I think that was a momentous act. Actually on our way to the museum palace, we passed the town square which was actually round and it is called the Praza de Libertao, Freedom Square, because there, the former slaves bought the freedom of their relatives and friends, By the way, when you go around the museum, they give you enormous slippers where you slip your shoes. I thought it was a good way of cleaning the floors because as you walk you actually are like “making lampaso”. When we were going out after the tour, Mother Martha Lucia said: prepare for a surprise. And the surprise was that 4 horses-drawn carriages were waiting for us and we returned to the monastery riding like queens and princesses on those “caroajes”. Only along the way, our horses got startled by the cars and the woman driver had to jump down to control them. Back at the convent we had another 6<sup>th</sup> star hotel lunch.

On our way home to Rio, we passed by the house of Albert Santos Dumont, who is considered here the inventor of the airplane. **Alberto Santos-Dumont** (20 July 1873 – 23 July 1932) was a Brazilian [aviation](#) pioneer. The heir of a wealthy family of coffee producers, Santos Dumont dedicated himself to aeronautical study and experimentation in [Paris](#), France, where he spent most of his adult life.<sup>[1]</sup> Santos-Dumont designed, built, and flew the first functioning [dirigible](#), demonstrating that controlled flight was possible. He won the [Deutsch de la Meurthe prize](#) on 19 October 1901 on a flight that rounded the [Eiffel Tower](#),<sup>[1]</sup> which made him one of the most famous people in the world during the early 20th century.<sup>[1]</sup> He built his own house a simple small two story house on the Enchanted Hill. It was an all purpose house with his bedroom serving as office during the day. One curious item in the house is the staircase. As he was a superstitious person, he used to walk up the stair of his house always starting with the right foot. So he purposely had the staircase made in such a way that made it impossible to start with the left foot.

## SALVADOR

Our first inland flight in Brazil was from Rio to Salvador because the one and a half flight would have been 12 hours by bus. So you could just imagine us 24 nuns in different habits lining up pushing our carts for the check –in. We were always checking one another just incase we have left someone. Mother Vera Lucia and her nuns were waiting for us in the airport and this time we have a huge tourist bus. Since it was almost 2 pm, we went to a Diocesan Retreat house near the airport situated along the ocean to have our lunch. The Sisters from countries with no beaches like the Germans, Midwest Americans, etc were all very excited as they saw the huge waves splashing to the shore. During lunch, I sat with a very interesting lady whom I thought was an oblate because she was wearing a St. Benedict’s medal. It turned out she was a postulant of Mother Vera Lucia’s

convent. She is 72 years old! She was happily married for 47 years. While still married, she met a Benedictine monk who got her interested in theology. Although her education was in Literature, she took up masters and later on doctorate in Patristic Theology and taught for a time in the university. When her husband died who was 20 years older than she, she decided to enter the convent. Before she will enter the Novitiate she is allowed to visit her daughter in Hong Kong whose husband is working with the World Bank. We were also introduced to a father and son who were just sitting at the parlor watching television when we arrived. Mother Vera Lucia whispered to me: "They are here as sanctuary because they are whistle-blowers." I wanted of course to know more about them but we had to leave for the convent of Mother Vera Lucia which is at the suburbs of the city. My impression of Salvador is that there are more poor people here than in the cities we have been so far. We passed through *fabellas* (slum areas) along the way and believe it or not the traffic is even worse than ours in the Philippines. So Mother Vera spent the time telling us about the foundation of her convent in 1977 and about their work among the poor. One interesting thing is that she opened a ballet school for psychologically disturbed children. She has more than a hundred ballet pupils and she herself was a ballet dancer before she entered.

The convent of Mosteiro de Salvador faces the ocean but is on top of a hill surrounded by *fabellas*. The nuns said that the convent stood alone for a long time in that place and the *fabellas* grew around them. What I notice here is that the *fabellas* are always built on top of hills. The houses are made of bricks but of course crowded together and looking dingy. I thought, at least they have a beautiful view. There are 28 nuns living in this convent and many are young and several have been sent to Rome to study in San Anselmo.

The first spot we visited was the lighthouse that is supposed to be the oldest lighthouse in South America. Then our guide, Carol explained to us that the state where Salvador is called Bahia, because it has the longest bay in Brazil-200 kilometers. They needed lighthouses because of the rocks that lined the shores. Then we went through the city center noting the contrast of *fabellas* on one side and the skyscrapers on the other. We went to the square called Jesus Terrenos. (Jesus "Terrain") because there at least 5 big churches around it, which is puzzling because there were not that many people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By the way the whole city of Salvador has 365 churches, one for each day. On the way to the cathedral, Carol showed us the site of the former beautiful cathedral but which was razed down by the governor for some unknown reason. Then there was the statue of the first archbishop of Salvador. The story was he was lost in a storm and natives saved him only to add him to their meal. There was the Portuguese who escaped being eaten by marrying one of the natives Katarina who later on initiated the building of the Cathedral and became a grand lady in the history of Salvador. The Cathedral was formerly the Jesuit Church and beside it you see a golden building which says Faculty of Education. The Church is of course Baroque and it boasts of a sacristy full of treasures. As we went to the end of the square to another Church we saw women dressed in voluminous petticoats, who earn some money by posing with the tourists. The other Church is Franciscan, also baroque but the special feature was a patio of walls with painted blue tiles depicting virtues and symbolic pictures with wise sayings underneath for example: "With death ends everything" "showing a dying king or "One can be a

philosopher in any state of life “showing a beggar preaching in a street corner. There were at least 30 such pictures.

From there we went to the Monastery of St. Benedict where we had our lunch. There are about 30 monks with 4 postulants, 2 novices and 5 Junior professed. They have a College with about 300 students. Their monastery is a very long building dating from 1584 which has the longest corridor I ever saw. It had valuable paintings, sculpture, furniture, etc. It is more like a museum than a monastery and I wondered how many people kept it clean and how the procurator must be getting crazy with its maintenance.

The last Church we visited was the Church of Jesus do Bon Fin (Jesus of the Good End) or the Resurrected Christ. The first thing you notice are the fences around the church filled with colorful bunting that swayed with the wind. And in the side chapel there is a room with lots of pictures of people who have been cured and hanging from the ceiling are plastic legs, big and small also symbolizing the cures that were supposed to have been experienced in that Church.

When we arrived at the Monastery, a Ballet Concert was waiting for us. We were treated with several numbers from the little ones to the only boy in the troupe who danced a solo. The ballet school not only teaches dance but gives the children self esteem and even harmonizes the members of their family. Isn't that a new form of evangelization, indeed?

Our last day is our Foundation Day over there but we also celebrated it here with great solemnity. They have a practice we can actually copy. At the end of the Mass, altar boys bring in a huge crucifix (the Assisi one) and then little girl angels in white come with their basket of flowers and some with incense showering flowers along the way and shower the cross with their flowers, too. Then we had some happy hour with the people who attended the Mass. That was a great ending for our stay in Salvador