
Brazilian Hands Weave the Sheets the Pope Will Sleep on in Brazil

Contributed by Débora Rubin
Friday, 06 April 2007

In the hands of four embroiderers from Potim, a city with 14,000 inhabitants in the interior of the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo, are being prepared the bed sheets that Pope Benedict XVI will use during the night he will spend at Aparecida Sanctuary, in the interior of the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo, during the trip he will take to the country in May.

Aparecida Sanctuary is the main Brazilian sanctuary for the Roman Catholics and is the site that receives the largest number of pilgrims.

The two sheets, pillowcase and pillow that make up the set are being adorned using a French technique of the XVIII century, *boutis* (pronounced boo-tee).

"Napoleon Bonaparte had a set of bedclothes made with this technique," explained Maria Celeste Chad, the founder of NGO Orientavida, which focuses on embroidery techniques for low-income families in the region of Aparecida, generating an occupation and work for the over 150 families.

The bedclothes to be used by the Pope, who is also scheduled to visit the city of Potim, were offered to the Archbishop of Aparecida do Norte, Dom Raymundo Damasceno Assis, by a couple who follow the work of the NGO.

The choice of *boutis* for the work was not incidental. The French technique demands dedication and patience. The four embroiderers can complete just three centimeters of embroidery per day, so hard is the work. One of the pillows is already complete. It took 45 days to complete.

And on the pillowcase, Celeste says that the words "Pope Benedict XVI" will be embroidered. The sheets will be made out of Egyptian cotton, and the wool is French. The bedclothes will be given to the Pope as a present.

Since the order was placed, Celeste has not had much peace. Journalists from the whole of Brazil are interested in visiting the NGO she established in 1999, when her husband, João Benedito Angelieri, was the mayor of the city. At the time, she noticed that she could make her position as first lady of the city more efficient.

As she already worked with decoration - importing household products - and she had good contacts in the field, she decided to invest in embroidery. "I myself do not know how to thread a needle. But I know how to sell very well," explained Celeste, who is a granddaughter of Lebanese. With the help of her mother, who is a seamstress, she started the project.

The Orientavida proposal was that each seamstress that arrived and learnt the job would teach the newcomers. Within this spirit, the project has been expanding year on year. It currently exists in another five cities.

Most of the participants work from home. The embroiderers earn according to their productivity. "There are some who make 100 reais (about US\$ 50,00), but others make 1,500 reais (about US\$ 750). It depends on each person," stated Celeste. They also get a food parcel.

Boutis was introduced to the NGO in 2003 at Celeste's desire, as she had always been in love with the technique. It was she who got in contact with Boutis Museum, in France, asking for help to introduce the work at Orientavida.

The president of the Museum offered to come to Brazil to teach the technique - at the occasion, 35 embroiderers were trained. Apart from Boutis, Orientavida also does work with thread embroidery, with stones, labyrinths and also crochet.

The NGO produces when luxury stores and famous brands like Daslu, Trussardi and Tânia Bulhões place their orders. They also already export to Spain, France and Portugal. Celeste has already taken her NGO to the Madrid Fashion Week twice. Her dream is to increase exports and enter the Arab countries.

Apart from custom made embroidery, she is also betting more and more on a unique line. There are four segments: T-shirts with religious motifs, articles for homes (cushions, tablemats, etc), adult fashion and children's fashion.

For the first time, this year the NGO had its own stand at a fair in São Paulo, Craft Design, and they sold all the material exhibited. "It was a great success," she said.

Celeste's family came from Zahle, Lebanon, over one 100 years ago and established roots in the city of Aparecida do Norte, where she was born. Her grandfather established a religious article store beside the Our Lady Aparecida Basilica.

Our Lady Aparecida is the patron saint of Brazil. From her forefathers came the knack for business. "I am very Arab, I love to sell and I greatly like the glossy gold thing. The embroiderers even joke about it," she says.

Celeste wants to make use of the Pope's bedclothes to catch the eye of the world with her work. Up to the end of the year, she plans to expand her NGO to another three cities in the region. And she warns that if the Pope really does visit the little Potim, she says she will make an effort to take him to the Orientavida offices.

Contact:

www.orientavida.org.br

Anba - www.anba.com.br