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Angera embraces Rolando: “It’s a miracle I’m alive”

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“Hugs have enormous power to heal, they’re one of the most powerful things we have.” His face is relaxed, but his eyes are still burdened with something. **Rolando Del Torchio** smiles and embraces friends and acquaintances, who, on Sunday morning, celebrated him in the council chamber. The occasion was a small, morning aperitif, organised by the administration and by Mayor **Alessandro Molgora**, to officially welcome back the former missionary, who was **kidnapped last 8 October**, in the Philippines, and who, for six months, remained in the hands of an ISIS-inspired group of Islamic terrorists.

Over the last few weeks, Rolando has described to journalists the most difficult times during his imprisonment, his fear and anxieties, but also his courage, faith and hope, which enabled him to survive that inferno. And he did the same this morning, in his hometown, on what may be one of the few occasions, at least for the moment, **when he speaks about what he suffered, to an audience**. “I’m here and I’m alive,” he said, “and it’s a miracle I’m alive, because I could so easily have died. There were times when I thought I wouldn’t make it. I’m better now, but I have to sort out my life, which was shaken up; I have to start again. **Every day, my thoughts go to the other hostages**, who were down there with me, one of them was killed. I only hope they’re set free.”

The return to normality is not simple, but is necessary. “I’ve been away for a few commitments, and it’s only for two days that I’ve been able to consider myself free to resume my life,” he said. “**I often go out for a walk in Angera, sometimes I go for a cup of coffee**. I love this place, which means a lot to me, and I have to thank everyone for being close, for the affection you’ve shown, and, at the same time, for

your discretion.”

“Angera **prayed for Rolando’s return**,” Molgora said. “After the vigil in church, our thoughts were always with him. There were difficult times, of dejection, when **I might meet the representatives of Hope**, the non-profit organisation he founded, **in the street**. At the same time, the hope that it would all come to a happy ending was always there. I’m happy to have him with us today, and to be able to celebrate simply, and with affection.”

Del Torchio spoke twice about the Philippines, where he has lived for thirty years, and where he has run a restaurant, the **Ur Choice Café, in Diplog City**, for some time. **First, to say that he intends to go back. “My work is there, and I’ve got some things to sort out.** I’m going back with protection, probably somewhere different, but I have to go back.” The second time was with a smile, as he spoke about the images of the Rocca of Angera shown on South-East Asian television. “In the next few days, a group of young Philippines who helped me are coming here for a visit. They want to see “this Angera”, where I live, and which they’ve heard about.”

As people bid their farewells, they brought Rolando a memory and a smile, a bit like as you do with a childhood friend who you haven’t seen for such a long time. And there were even those who had never met him before, who did the same. “We don’t know each other,” one lady said while shaking his hand, “but I’m really happy you’re back, and I wanted to be here to meet you.”

di aria Carla Cebrelli Translated by Prof. Rolf Cook