



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P., Director Lesley Warnshuis, Office Manager Nancy Keating, Finance Manager

2506 Pine Street P.O. Box 15367 San Francisco, CA 94115-0367 415-931-2183 www.dominicanmission.org

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All Are Welcome

Dear Mission Friends:

Hospitality is intrinsic to a sense of community. This month, our missionary Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P. (right) depicts for us some customs of hospitality in Rabinal, where the people have made him feel welcomed for eighteen years now. He attests that they are always happy to share with visitors what little they have, welcoming them unhesitatingly into their community and their homes.

In biblical times, hospitality was often shown by washing the feet of one's visitors. People generally washed their own sandaled feet before entering a house to keep the dust out. But apparently, as seen at times in both the Old and New Testaments, it was not uncommon for the host to send out a servant to wash his guests' feet, or sometimes the host himself would come outside to perform the task. More than just keeping the floor clean, this custom indicated to visitors that they were most welcome and that the host would be at their service as long as they were guests in his home.

The custom is replicated every year in the Holy Thursday Mass, imitating Jesus' gesture of humility and love the night before he died:



Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and dry them... He said to them: ...What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do (John 13:5, 12, 15).

Following Jesus' example, the Church has included washing of the feet in its liturgy since at least the seventh century, when it was performed mostly in monasteries. Records from the seventeenth century show that it was becoming a Holy Thursday ritual, during which priests would wash the feet of the poor. Pope Pius XII's 1955 Holy Week reforms made it a more public (although never obligatory) ritual. He decreed that just after the homily of a parish's evening Mass on Holy Thursday, the priest should wash and kiss the feet of twelve men to commemorate Jesus' gesture. However last year, Pope Francis saw the need for a formal revision of the wording in Pope Pius XII's decree, wanting it to

express more fully the metaphorical meaning: that Jesus was "giving of himself 'unto the end' for the salvation of the world, his charity having no bounds." And so he revised, for example, the description of the ritual in the *Roman Missal* from, "The men who have been chosen..." to "Those who have been chosen from among the people of God..." **It is only right, he explained, that all, including, men and women, young and old, healthy and sick, clergy, religious, and laity, be represented in the washing of the feet.** Many priests had been including women for the last few years—even the Pope himself, who has also included non-Catholics—but now they are officially welcome!

Most of you will recognize Fr. Tim's creative hand in this free verse meditation in which he echoes, at the end, Pope Francis' message of inclusion.

In loving service,
Lesley Warnshuis

“Christ is Risen!”

The song echoes in the neighborhood on Easter morning.
 If one looks down the street from the church on the town square
 As the sun begins to rise, the procession can be glimpsed at a distance.
 The image of the resurrected Jesus holding the banner of victory
 In those first rays of sunlight grows larger and clearer as it approaches.
 The carriers bear Him on their shoulders,
 The joy of the miracle animating their steps after the night vigil.

Hold that picture. Carry it in your wallet, your purse, your memories.
 It is the vision of heaven here on earth, it is the Promised Land.
 Savor it and contemplate what it means for your life.
 Hide away in the quiet of your house or your garden
 And break into smiles and song as you celebrate your fortune,
 Not as a miser counts his money or a politician his votes,
 But as one enriched beyond measure with the love of God.

The Risen Lord with glorious wounds,
 Floating above heads in the brightening rays along our streets,
 Accompanied by the holy band of believers
 who have left everything behind to follow him.
 He holds the keys of death and life and the nether world.
 He ascends to the heights of heaven in the glory of the Father,
 But visits us and assures us that He will always be at our side.
 Who could not understand that this is the true treasure?

How to celebrate Easter?
 A beach outing, a picnic, a big family dinner, a movie, a concert?
 We must celebrate that we entered into the spirit of Lent,
 Passed through the time of penance, made our spiritual renewal.
 So what is our reward? A relief from all the spiritual effort?
 A prize to bring back a balance to our very material life?
 A distraction to keep from facing the brutality of the crucifixion?
 No, none of those.

Jesus is the reward.
 He appeared and said, “My Peace be with you,”
 And the apostles were beyond themselves with joy.
 Now they could begin to fathom the mystery of who Jesus was.
 It stunned them to remember their confusion, their doubt,
 Their viewing all that Jesus did and said as political.
 Now they saw the power of this world’s rulers as impotent.
 They realized that genuine power was in the truth etched into the heart,
 Planted in the conscience by the God who revealed himself in Jesus

Pilate who condemned Jesus to death was the great prophet.
 He put forth the question that God asks the entire world,
 “And what is truth?”
 The answer stood before him in the person of Jesus, who said,
 “I am the truth, and the way and the life.”
 But Pilate was unwilling to listen to his heart and be satisfied.



*Fr. Martin Walsh during last year's
Holy Thursday Mass in Mexicali.*

(He hadn't gotten the memo yet.)

You have that truth.

Relish it, guard it, cultivate it, and don't tire of repeating all day,
 “Jesus is risen from the dead and present in my heart.
 I believe in the Son of God, as Savior of the World.”
 Catch the joy! Hold onto it.
 Like Mary Magdalen, stay by the tomb
 And savor the greatness of God, he who entered into our darkness
 To shine the light of the truth: We are risen in Jesus.

He is alive and present in his word, his church, his family.
 I can't help but smile to think that he appeared to me on Easter:
 I saw him come down from the cross and be placed in the tomb.
 I saw him as he was raised. He showed me his wounds and
 He ate and drank with me at the Holy Eucharist.

How long can I hold onto that joy? It is like seeing a newborn baby:
 I cannot believe the beauty of that small creature, so lovely--
 An angel sent by God to fill me with wonder and thanks.
 I want to sneak into the room and sit by the crib and watch.
 I would never tire of filling my mind with that vision.

Yet the vision of faith of the risen Jesus captures me more.
 I see the multitude of all the children of God
 As newborn infants in the new life of the resurrection,
 Being embraced by the loving arms of the Father.
 They are from every race and language, country and tribe,
 All being welcomed into Jesus' Body, the Church.

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, I minister in the town of Rabinal located in the center of Guatemala. While the country itself is rich in resources, it remains one of the poorest in Latin America, with shamefully high rates of malnutrition and illiteracy due primarily to its corrupt government. Rabinal is not far from the capital, Guatemala City, but because it is surrounded by the rugged Chuacús Mountains, getting there requires a circuitous route of roughly 140 miles on serpentine roads with many steep cliffs and no guard rails. Its remoteness as well as the steep mountainsides which impede productive farming make it one of the poorest cities in this poor country. **But in spite of, or possibly because of, the devastating poverty of the devout people of Rabinal, their manifestations of faith and love, which come from great sacrifice, are indeed authentic and meaningful.**

Even though they have very little, they have somehow *caught the joy*, feeling *enriched beyond measure with the love of God*. For example, the city is famous for its religious celebrations in which its sixteen indigenous confraternities welcome and share with the public a myriad of dances and bands and native foods. It is impossible to convey with mere words a sense of the richness of it all.

The particular procession described in the meditation above, occurring during last



The risen Lord, wearing his banner of victory, floating above the heads of thousands of faithful

year's Holy Week, lasted eight hours from the first float to the last. And there were similarly extravagant processions for each day of the week, all accompanied by at least 1,000 people, culminating on Good Friday when around 5,000 people filled the church and the square as they awaited the arrival of the crucified Jesus. This happens every year, and almost as soon as the week is over, preparations have begun for the next year. Groups of young and old are involved, raising funds, designing, organizing, and, throughout Lent, decorating till midnight.

Indeed, Rabinal has been called the cradle of indigenous folk customs. Its *Rabinal Achí*, the only surviving example of a pre-Columbian dance drama, is world renowned and was declared an "Intangible Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO. Celebrations in Guatemala City or the old capitol of Antigua are even more elaborate and certainly more organized and refined, but having been created out of practically nothing makes those of Rabinal more amazing.

Their home-grown nature is, after all, in keeping with the truth of Jesus, who came down to our level to preach in the street and was rejected by the elite establishment. Rabinal's celebrations seem to arise from deep within the hearts and psyches of its people and are indeed a sign of faith-in-action.

Another sign of faith-in-action made more meaningful by their poverty is their tradition of hospitality. I often visit the families of the students in my scholarship program, and one day last year, on what turned out to be an especially miserable day during the rainy season, I set out to visit three families. After a stressful hour of my car bumping and lurching and splashing its way up the rugged mountain, I came to the first home. The oldest boy was away at college finishing his agronomy studies, but the parents and the other children had been awaiting my arrival. Their house was typical, made of rough-cut planks with small spaces between them, a dirt floor, and a tile roof. The space was small and dark, so I was invited to sit down on a bench in the front of the house.



One of the far away houses I visited, typical of the region, this one belonging to the family of a scholarship student in my Jovenes Arriba program.

Always anxious to learn first-hand about the struggles and needs of the villagers, I asked the father about his land and crops and cattle. He said the land produced almost nothing and that he'd had to sell his cattle to help pay for the extra college costs not covered by his son's scholarship.

After a short while I stood up to go, but they were surprised and, it seemed, a bit hurt. They asked me to stay for a cup of coffee and a sweet roll, especially made for my visit. Of course I stayed and enjoyed the morning snack, got to know the children a bit more, and took lots of pictures of the family and their home. When we got to the next house, the same thing happened. As I was about to leave after a nice visit, they protested, saying they had prepared lunch, so I stayed and had more to eat. Time was running out for the third house though, so I phoned ahead to tell them to hold off on the lunch which, yes, they had started to prepare.

Making my way to that house was more stressful as the car climbed even higher and, coming to the end of the road, I had to cross a precarious little bridge made of rotted planks. After another warm, welcoming visit, I was given some peaches and blackberries—prize gifts that time of year—to take home.

If all people followed Jesus and shared their bread as these villagers do, malnutrition and hunger would be greatly alleviated. But more than the gifts or the meals, it is also the warmth of the hosts' welcome, the willingness to share their story, and the graciousness to be interested in mine that define hospitality. **These ordinary human customs enshrine much deeper values of respect, compassion, friendship and peace. They recall God himself who invites us to partake of the heavenly banquet 'here and hereafter.'** *He ate and drank with me at the Holy Eucharist.* And so I've learned that such visits must not be rushed.

I've learned that if a missionary takes the time to listen to those he serves and attempts to see the world from their position, he or she will better understand how to impart to them his life-giving message—the truths of the faith. One of these is that God loves us all in our individuality, that not only does each person have great value in God's eyes, but also each community and various groups to which they belong. Because the society and government here have long tried to rob the native Achí Indians of their identity, much of my work has been to affirm their identity.

And so I promote their Achí Mayan culture and traditions through such projects as translating liturgical songs and Bible readings to their language; assisting a group of women with selling their beautifully-intricate weavings; and, my primary project, orienting youth and their families to opportunities for scholarships and jobs, encouraging them to stay in Rabinal to help lift it up economically and socially.

Somehow the villagers here manage to always be welcoming and hospitable, sharing with others what little they have. And I always keep a pot of coffee on the ready in my office because I try to imitate their good example. You're all welcome to come for a visit and a cup of coffee to see for yourselves!

Happy Easter Season and may the Risen Lord bless you.

Fr. Timothy