



# MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

## DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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### *A JOURNEY TO THE DEPTHS OF HIS HEART*



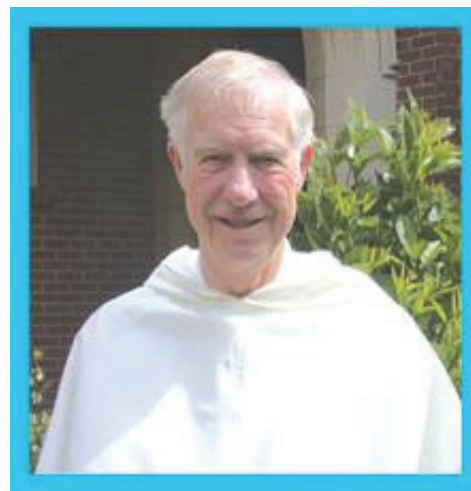
Dear Mission Friends:

Last month we reflected upon the life of our dear Fr. Felix Cassidy, O.P., who served joyfully for us as a missionary in Chiapas, in southern Mexico. This month we pay homage to our beloved former provincial, Fr. Paul Scanlon, O.P., who also died last year, within days of Fr. Cassidy. Fr. Paul visited our mission in Chiapas every year of his two terms as provincial, growing to love the people and promoting it with great fervor. And he was a missionary himself for several years in Mexicali, our mission in northern Mexico.

Fr. Paul was born in 1933 to parents whose great faith and devotion laid the firm foundation for his lifelong friendship with the Lord Jesus. While in high school, he dreamed of putting his love for the outdoors and his knack for carpentry to good use as a missionary, picturing himself **“riding [his] horse through the woods, building churches, and bringing hope to people.” \***

After his ordination to the Dominican priesthood in 1959, Father always remained **“open to the surprises and new adventures to which the Lord invited [him.]”** His assignments were indeed many and varied and, recognized as a leader early on, Father spent 40 of his 50 years in religious life in positions of authority. Though it would be two decades before there was talk of a missionary assignment, he was content knowing that **“[God] carefully crafts us by hand, leading us along labyrinthine pathways known only to [Him].”**

He began at St. Peter Martyr in Pittsburg, CA, where he discovered great joy working in youth ministry, followed by St. Mary Magdalen in Berkeley, where he began his lifelong collaboration and friendship with the Mission San Jose Dominican Sisters. He was called to be novice master in Kentfield; elected as prior of the Dominican House of Studies in Oakland; and just two years later, elected to be Provincial of the Western Dominican Province, serving two terms. This was a time of transition and renewal in the Church and the Order following the Second Vatican Council, and his leadership inspired hope and openness within the Province.



**Father Paul Scanlon, O.P.**

Finally, after being called to Arizona State University in Tempe to make use of his gift for energizing youth ministry, he was assigned as a missionary to Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Mexicali, where he served nine years, interrupted only by a short stint as Student Master at St. Albert's Priory in Oakland. He often referred to his missionary ministry as the most important nine years of his life, during which he acquired a heightened interest in social justice issues and a deeper knowledge of God through living among the poor whom he found to be truly rich in goodness and faith.

Mexicali was followed by St. Dominic's Parish in the Eagle Rock section of Los Angeles; Holy Family Cathedral in faraway Anchorage, AK;



*The church of San Jacinto de Polonia (St. Hyacinth of Poland), founded by Dominican Friars in 1564. Abandoned for centuries, it became our headquarters when our province took over the Chiapas mission in 1963.*

St. Christopher by the Sea in the Aleutian Islands; back to the Bay Area as prior at St. Dominic's in San Francisco; and then, upon his request, he retired to Eagle Rock, which had been one of his fondest assignments, having formed a close-knit bond with the parishioners. The Filipinos in particular remember how he went off to Manila to study Tagalog in order to better serve them.

Father once said, **"I am blessed and humbled that the Lord Jesus has let me serve Him in so many ways and in so many places."** It was while he was in the Aleutian Islands that Father documented what he learned from the wonderful disparity of his ministries in an inspiring book, *Finding the Elusive God*. In the preface, he wrote, **"This crisscrossing of continents allowed me to discover a commonality in the outlook of those who live close to the land, whose lives are often negatively affected by modern technology and materialism. I discovered a beautiful simplicity of faith that could enrich those of us who have materially so much more than they. These meditations are meant, in an odd sense of irony, to be an offering to each of us from the treasures of the poor,**

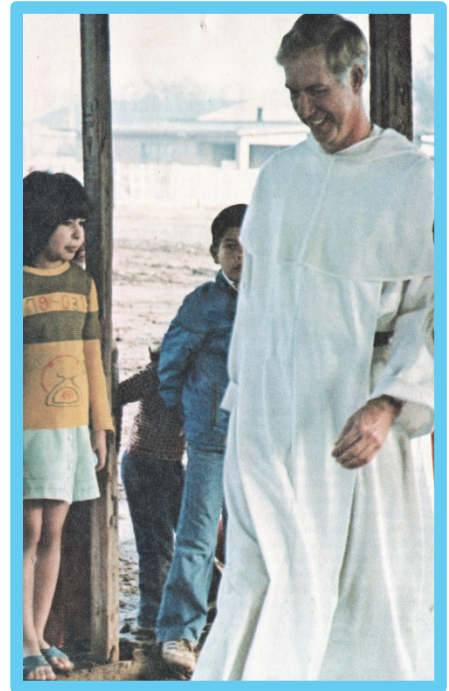
**God's 'lowly' ones, of what they can teach us about prayer and contemplation, life and death, suffering and joy..."**

In Fr. Paul's honor, I wish to share with you some telling memories described in *Finding the Elusive God*. In "Not a Sparrow Falls," some may recall, Fr. Paul witnesses a moment of pure love amid abject poverty in Chiapas:

**"The tropical rain pounded the sixteenth-century church so hard it was nearly impossible for us to hear one another, a great excuse to take a break from our staff meeting. My fellow Chiapas missionary team members and I stepped outside, stood under the eaves, and chatted idly until we noticed an indigenous man standing in the cloister garden.**

**He had no umbrella, no rain gear, [but] he didn't move...I wish I could say I rushed over to help him, but I didn't. Another team member, Sr. Mari, stepped out into the rain and led him inside. She dried him off. Fluent in Tzeltal, she listened to his story.**

**His name was Manuel. His wife had just died, and he didn't know what to do or where to go. We agreed that Sr. Mari would accompany him to the carpenter's shop and have a casket made...That evening Sr. Mari and I, accompanied by Fr. Vincent [Foerstler, O.P.], the pastor, headed out in the mission's truck to pick up the grieving widower and the coffin. We loaded the simple pine box into the truck bed, and then Manuel and I climbed in beside it... The road was thick with mud as we drove off beyond the edge of town and past the last few houses and their faint lights.**



*Fr. Paul in Mexicali—Kids would flock to him.*

**Manuel told us when to stop...in the middle of a pitch-black, sloppy, muddy nowhere. We slid the box out and began our trek to Manuel's house...Fr. Vincent and I carried the coffin...above our heads as we crossed through a deep culvert filled with rushing water and... crossed a field in pure blackness except for a faint beam from Sr.'s flashlight. After a couple hundred yards, Manuel told us...that we had arrived...His house, his home, made of sugar cane and pine branches woven together, had no lights, no driveway, no address.**

**Fr. Vincent and I...eased the box alongside the body of Manuel's wife, which was lying on the wet earth in the one-room hut. A small fire was burning on the floor. It was mostly a handful of embers, but the occasional flicker of flame showed that the woman had been in her mid-thirties. I can't tell you her name; I never learned it.**



With difficulty, Fr. Vincent and I lifted her to place her in the casket...[when] a young boy slipped between us. I hadn't seen him in the semidarkness; my attention had been fixed upon the dead woman. The young son was saying goodbye to his mother.

He gently straightened out the woman's hair, wiped the moisture and bits of mud from her face, and kissed her on the forehead. No one moved as he took a *petate*—a light bedroll—and laid it over her in a simple gesture of love and farewell. That mud floor, I'm certain, was holy ground.

Even today I remain touched by the tenderness with which the boy caressed his mother's face for what he knew would be the last time...Since that evening, I have thought of that bedroll; I have remembered that box. I've been comforted by the thought that although she was a stranger even to the people who lived in Ocosingo, she was known and loved by God. That little sparrow—that wife, that mother, that woman whose name I never heard—is known and loved by God. He cherishes her. She is wrapped in a *petate* of His infinite love, for...

...‘Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.’ “



†

Luke 12:6



*Above, typical home on the outskirts of Ocosingo, Chiapas like that of Manuel's family.  
Right, Fr. Paul with una abuelita in Mexicali.*



In “God's Work of Art,” Father describes one of his ministries in Mexicali: a poor but selfless community living in a brickyard in houses made of plywood and cardboard because they couldn't afford to use the very bricks they baked.:

“A sprinkling of about 30 families lived in this field where they baked bricks from the adobe soil on which they lived. No air conditioning. No running water. Too few trees. Yet I never once heard them complain and if asked, they readily shared what little food or clothing they had with a neighbor who needed it more.

One Sunday a month, a group of devout parishioners and I would bring clothes, friendship, song, and Scripture to these humble people living on the edge of society. The parishioners' good works gave them great joy and meaning, but could the poor see the sincerity that motivated their visitors? Or was it demeaning to them? Did it only make them feel more like castoffs to receive castaway clothes?

I tried to impart to them that just as the helpless Babe was present in that grungy feed trough in Bethlehem, so too is He present

now in this dry, dusty field to offer them living water. But they hardly had drinking water! Did they sense Jesus' presence at all? Could they comprehend that they were as welcomed by Jesus as the visiting parishioners? As me? What should I say to them? What would Jesus tell them?

I usually settled upon the theme that ‘[God's] love for each of us is unique...No one is nameless, no one is an orphan, each of us has our name written on the palms of God's hands and inscribed on Jesus' sacred heart.’ So true, but was it enough?

The day I realized that I always rushed through Mass to get home sooner because the air I inhaled baked my throat, the dust from the field clogged my nose, and a blazing sun charbroiled me, was the day I knew that these brickbakers and their families should be preaching to *me*. And that whatever they would say is what Jesus would say to us all.

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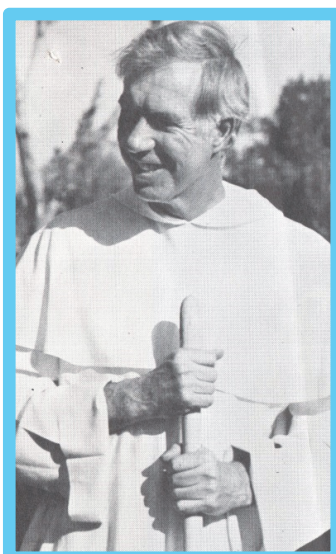
Father Paul once said, “I am blessed and humbled that the Lord Jesus has let me serve Him in so many ways and in so many places.” Indeed, he had been pastor at several parishes, built churches,

inspired youth, formed novices, led the province, wrote books, and so much more.

But he lamented, **“I took such pride in accomplishments and so little time simply to be.”** And, just as he had realized during Mass in that hot, dry brickyard, **“I was so busy talking and teaching about the Lord that I took so little time to talk with Him.”** In his homilies he would ask, **“Why do we blind ourselves to the dignity and beauty that God has poured into us?”** Yet he himself prayed to become pure of heart, to give of himself for no other reason than love, but in his raw honesty and humility, felt that there was **“too much in [him] yet of the ‘false self’, the need for approval, the desire for success, the craving to look good in the eyes of others...”**

When the teenage Paul Scanlon dreamed of bringing hope to people, on horseback, I doubt if he anticipated that through his missionary ministries, His own hope—and faith and love—would be strengthened and purified. He writes that it was **“the poor and humble class of Mexicali that gifted [him] with their wisdom that one need not be a bishop or governor to be beloved by God, for these men who sold tacos on the street and the women who worked picking lettuce under a broiling sun were as Christ-like as anyone I ever met in the sacred halls of the Vatican. I am greatly indebted to these humble people so rich in faith and generously accepting in their love.”**

*Father at a groundbreaking for a new parish chapel.*

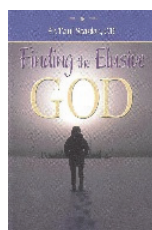


Serving the poor and broken, Father came to realize that **“Persons of prayer, or of contemplative soul, or those who have suffered greatly somehow develop a more penetrating awareness of God’s presence in His handiwork, the human person.”**

With all of Father’s prayer and contemplation and meditation and looking inward and questioning and struggling and confronting suffering head-on, he must certainly have developed **“a more penetrating awareness of God’s presence in His handiwork, the human person.”**

And so, as he had preached to others for years, he learned first-hand that **“It is in finding God that we find our true self, and conversely, it is in finding our true self that we find God.”** I’m quite sure you are resting in peace, Dear Friend.

*Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P*



*\*All quotations in bold are taken from Fr. Scanlon’s book, Finding the Elusive God.*

While the conditions Father describes are sadly typical of those encountered even today by Dominican missionaries, your generous contributions over the past 53 years have been invaluable in improving the quality of life for many, in Mexico and elsewhere. We thank you especially in this month of **Thanksgiving** for all of your selfless support in all of its forms, from encouraging notes to heartfelt prayer to financial sacrifices. I know Fr. Paul will intercede with God for all of you asking his blessings and grace.

### **St. Martin de Porres Triduum**

**Nov. 1:** *St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.*

**(Your petitions, followed by the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**

**Closing Prayer:** *Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God’s holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.*

**Nov. 2:** *St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to commend us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**

**Nov. 3:** *Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.*

**(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)**