

October 19, 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Br. Marty Shea, MM – San Pancho, Petén, Guatemala

Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6	Unbelievers will come to know the true God.
Psalms 96: 1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10	God rules the peoples with fairness.
First Thessalonians 1: 1-5	Early believers recognized in one another the virtues of faith, love and endurance in hope of Jesus Christ.
Matthew 22: 15-21	“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

Guatemala’s civil war raged for over 35 years and displaced one million people from their homes. As part of the “scorched earth” policy intended to wipe out possible civilian support for the guerrillas, the government committed over 600 massacres. While some survivors took refuge in Mexico, others sought anonymity in cities, and some fled to remote mountainous and forested regions where they formed Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs). Three CPR populations emerged, in the Ixcán, Petén, and Sierra regions. They lived in hiding and worked collectively for survival.

Because the CPRs refused to move into the “model villages” where soldiers controlled the population, the army targeted them with ruthless zeal. Many community members died in the jungle of the Petén between 1980 and 1996 from gunfire, hunger, illness, or exposure. During the daytime people limited their movements. They cooked only in the dark; otherwise the army could see the smoke and attack. They came to know well the shadows and the contours of the landscape at night.

As the civil war began winding down in the mid-1990s, members of the CPRs negotiated with the government and most families have obtained lands but continue their communal existence. Their integration into Guatemalan society has been slow and tenuous and many still seek reconciliation. The economic situation in the country has worsened and many still feel marginalized with little opportunity for supporting their simple livelihoods. On a national level, the CPRs participate politically through marches and conferences on indigenous rights and land struggles.

The following is based on Br. Marty Shea’s reflections on today’s readings with members of the community of Salvador Fajardo, the CPR where he lives and works. Community members experienced great tragedy during the years of war in Guatemala and have strong opinions about the role that the U.S. played during that time.

This Sunday we find ourselves with Jesus as his adversaries - determined to be rid of him - try once again to trap him. He managed to escape at least for a while before going to Jerusalem where the trap finally closes and results in his execution.

What traps have our community here in the Petén of Guatemala encountered? In a war of genocide the Guatemalan military set random traps by which grenades would be activated when tripped by people walking these mountain trails. The community we live in now is named after Salvador Fajardo who was killed by such a device. We know the traps and we know who set them: the Guatemalan military with the support and training of the United States.

Can you imagine your country backing a genocidal war? That has been our history here in Guatemala. Like Jesus, we escaped 626 massacres and now live in freedom after long years in exile in refugee camps in Mexico and in the safety of the jungle. The fears and scars are still there. Now perhaps we can ask the United States some questions.

- What are some of the traps you have fallen into?
- Do you believe that your country could participate in a genocidal war?
- Do you believe that your country is capable of setting traps, of torture and war?

Jesus was wary of traps but eventually they were successful in executing him. We continue to be wary of what military and political leaders do here and in countries that make alliances with inhuman military institutions. Is there any chance that the transformation from genocide to programs of freedom and development could be realized?

It is time for change. People are migrating out of desperation. Would your great country dare to respond with programs that bring life, peace and development to your neighbors?

For more information:

Nonviolent conflict resolution is something that a new president and congress can begin to invest in as a means toward world peace. Read more in "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates' policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the source of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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