



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Summer 2019

Vol. 56 No. 7+8

My Face Is Your Face

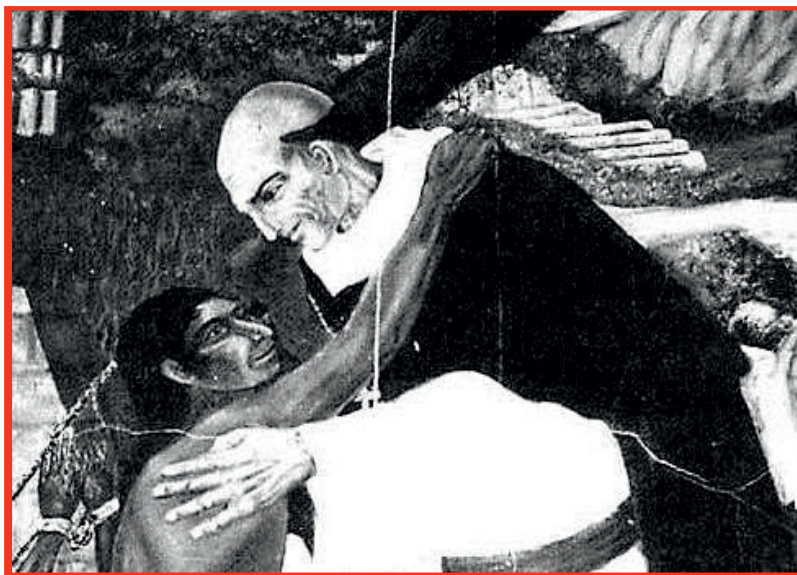
*The right to religious freedom
has its foundation in the very
dignity of the human person.*



Dear Mission Friends:

This line could very well have been pulled from the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees five basic civil liberties, including freedom of religion. However, and perhaps a bit surprisingly, it's a line from a December 1965 *papal* message. Paul VI was reiterating a key teaching from an earlier Vatican II document, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: *"The Church rejects, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination ... or harassment ... because of ... race, colour, condition of life, or religion."*

The cornerstone of Catholic social teaching—that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God and equally endowed with rational souls—confers equal dignity to each of us. It is based upon St. Paul's message of Jesus that *"there is no distinction between male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or free, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:26-28).



*Ancient
rendition
depicting the
mutual respect
and love
between
Dominican
friar
Bartolomé
de Las Casas
and one of the
people native
to his new
home in
Chiapas.*

But Paul VI's document ventures further—not only does it forbid discrimination based on religious [or any other] differences, it actually calls us to respect and honor those differences: *"[The Church rejects] nothing that is true and holy in ... religions found everywhere [that] try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing 'ways,' comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."*

However, a pope's proclamation (neither his nor those of any of his successors) does not necessarily lead to compliance.

Years after Vatican II ended, Paul VI lamented, *"Who does not see what a long way there is still to go to...put principles into practice...?"* In fact, too often messages like those of both Paul VI and Paul the Apostle are silenced by a blaring—though imagined—sense of superiority, by which even initially well-intentioned attempts to love one's neighbor can degenerate into a paternalism that negates the other's dignity. Throughout history, faith-based groups, not excluding the Church, have imposed their own beliefs and culture onto those whom they professed to be serving, essentially eradicating the beliefs and culture of their host region. And the deafening urges for 'gold' or power have led many down even more corrupt paths, demanding conversion upon threat of unspeakable torture, enslavement, or the cruelest of deaths—for entire families.

With God's grace, however, there are always a few good Dominicans...er...people who are able to keep Truth at the forefront, leaving hope for the world in their wake. In the 1490s at Spain's University of Salamanca, Dominican students preparing for missionary work were increasingly troubled by the discrimination aspects of colonialism, especially when they learned that Columbus had returned from the New World bringing "souvenir" slaves.

Upon arriving in Hispaniola in 1510 and witnessing first-hand the atrocities inflicted upon the natives, those Dominican friars preached adamantly and fearlessly against the injustices. One wealthy Spanish slave-owner, Bartolomé de Las Casas, was inspired and transformed by the Dominicans' preaching. Perhaps realizing that "a Christian slaveholder's Christian slaves were still slaves" (as Notre Dame theologian David Bentley Hart has put it), he freed his slaves, gave away his land, and eventually became a Dominican priest. An inspiring preacher and writer, Las Casas argued valiantly for equal and humane treatment for the indigenous, being named "Protector of the Indians." The colonialists' greed and prejudice proved to be more powerful, though, and any human rights laws he ushered in were largely ignored during his lifetime. He was forced to cut short his assignment as Bishop of Chiapas, Mexico due to hostility against his defense of the natives and their traditions. But he never stopped preaching and writing about justice and equality and respect, proclaiming:

"Men want to be taught, not forced...there is no greater or more arduous step than for a man to abandon the religion which he had once embraced."

The full measure of his contribution to human rights was eventually honored in 1848 when the Chiapas colonial city of San Cristóbal would be renamed San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

In 1959, La Casas devotee Samuel Ruiz García would be appointed Bishop of the Chiapas diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, following in the footsteps of his predecessor and hero and echoing his passions: ***"The first step in the work of being a missionary is not to preach a message to those who have not heard of it, but rather to investigate the cultures in order to discover what God is doing and speaking already in the hearts of these men and women."*** Over the forty years that the beloved Don Samuel served the Tzeltal and Tzotzil people, he honored and embraced the traditional culture that they held so dear. He learned four Mayan languages and regularly traveled by horseback to the most remote villages, bringing the sacraments incorporated with ancient local rituals and symbols.



Left, various lay servers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal celebrating the Eucharist together; below, Dominican friars Rafael and Pedro embracing local traditions and garb.

It was in 1963 in Chiapas, shortly after Don Samuel arrived, that our Western Dominican Province established its first mission. We carried on the legacy of genuine respect inspired by both Las Casas, our fellow friar, and Don Samuel, combining what is "true and holy" from both the Catholic and Mayan traditions.

And for decades, with the help of you, our Mission Friends, we have continued to support those ministries in Chiapas which are guided by the Catholic social teaching—as described by theologian Fr. Daniel Groody in his book, *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice*—"that all human beings must see within every person both a reflection of God and a mirror of themselves." Or, as the ancient Mayan saying puts it more simply and perhaps more vividly, ***"My face is your face. When I look at you, I see myself."***



Recently Fr. Gonzalo Ituarte, yet another good Dominican serving in San Cristóbal de Las Casas (see p. 4, 'Baptism' picture), shared with us these photos depicting joyful, faith-filled moments from throughout the expansive parish, and we share them with you. Look closely—you might see yourself!

In peace,
Lesley Warnshuis

*The
Banquet
of
Life
to which all
are equally
invited...*

~John Paul II



*Boys to men—
Faith abides.*



Sacramental grace knows no bounds.

Baptism



Confirmation



First Communion



Holy Orders



Anointing of the Sick



Upcoming Mission Appeals

If you are in the area, please come and say hello to our director, Fr. Martin Walsh, O.P., who will be preaching at the weekend Masses as follows:

July 21:	St. Anthony of Padua in San Francisco
July 27-28:	St. Anne in Las Vegas NV
Aug. 3-4:	St. Helena in St. Helena
Aug. 10-11:	La Virgen de Guadalupe in Mesquite NV
Aug. 17-18:	Our Lady of Victory in Compton
Aug. 24-25:	St. Joseph in Cotati
Aug 31-Sept. 1:	Holy Spirit in Los Angeles
Sept. 14-15:	St. Catherine of Siena in Dinuba
Sept. 28-29:	St. Thomas More in Sandy UT
Oct. 6:	Holy Cross in Tulelake