

Remembering the Massacres



*By Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.
Rabinal, Guatemala*

I am here in Guatemala representing our Western Dominican Province at a conference sponsored by the Dominican Friars and Sisters of Latin America on the theme of human rights. We are commemorating the military massacres that took place in Guatemala in the early 1980's when **thousands** of mostly indigenous people were brutally murdered. **In a period of less than two years (1980-1982), in the region around Rabinal where our Dominican Missionaries minister, 1,270 Achi Indians were massacred in military operations. Catholics and Catholic catechists were specifically chosen as victims of torture**

and death by the then-president of Guatemala, General Rios Mont.

As part of our conference, we traveled high up in the mountains above Rabinal to the village of Plan de Sanchez where our missionary, Father Timothy Conlan, O.P., attends to the spiritual needs of the present-day inhabitants. The purpose of our visit was to interview the survivors of a massacre that took place there 25 years ago, so that the

memory of these atrocities might not be forgotten.

According to the testimony of the survivors, on July 18, 1982, soldiers arrived at the mouth of a small canyon alongside the village of Plan de Sanchez and blocked the passage of Indians coming up from attending Mass and market day down in Rabinal and returning to their tiny mountain villages. The soldiers took them prisoners.

The soldiers waited at the small passageway between the mountains in the background of this picture and took prisoners in this field.





Our conference members took part in an anniversary Mass commemorating the 25th anniversary of the massacres in the village of Plan de Sanchez in this chapel built over the site of the house where the victims were burned alive. Fr. Timothy is pictured here along with the survivors and their descendants.

The young women were locked in a house and later raped and killed. Elderly people were locked in another house, which was soon set on fire with those

inside being burned alive. Little children were killed and tossed into the burning building. The younger men were brutally tortured and then killed.

In that one afternoon, 260 people suffered and died in the small village of Plan de Sanchez.

Narcisa Corazon Geronimo was ten years old at the time of the massacre. She saw her parents and family members being killed and she ran to her aunt's house and together they fled up the mountainside and survived. Some of the men catechists were away at the time and returned to find their wives and children dead. Here Narcisa, overlooking one of the mass graves, gives her testimony.



As we draw close to the New Year of 2008 and look back on past atrocities such as the massacre of Plan de Sanchez, we are tempted to lose hope for a better world. Yet, with the eyes of faith, we recall the vision of the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 2:1-6)

*In the days to come
The mountain of the
Temple of Yahweh
Shall tower above the
mountains and be lifted
higher than the hills.
All the nations shall
stream to it, peoples
without number will come
to it; and they will say:
'Come, let us go up to the
mountain of the Lord, to
the Temple of the God of
Jacob that he may teach
us his ways so that we
may walk in his paths.'
He will yield authority
over the nations and
adjudicate between many
peoples; they will
hammer their swords into
ploughshares, their
spears into sickles.
Nation will not lift up
sword against nation,
there will be no more
training for war. O
house of Jacob, come let
us walk in the light of
Yahweh.*



Achi Indian children in one of the villages of the massacres in their First Holy Communion Mass being celebrated by Fr. Timothy Conlan and Fr. Martin Walsh.

The faith goes on in the Achi villages of the massacres as Fr. Timothy Conlan celebrates another First Holy Communion Mass.



Here in Rabinal, I find hope for the dawn of universal peace and justice through the ministry of Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P. and the Friars of the Dominican Province of Central America. My prayer is that the accompanying photographs of Father Timothy's ministry will give hope to you, our mission friends, as we enter this New Year. May you have a blessed and hope-filled New Year,

Fr Martin de Porres Walsh, OP



Reina, Elvira, Norma and Sandra are Achi Indian young women enrolled in nursing schools in Guatemala City. Here Fr. Timothy is visiting the little apartment that he has rented for them in the city and discussing graduation plans with them. Through their years of study, Father Timothy has provided tuition and room and board for the children of the Achi villagers that he has sent to the capital city to study.

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Under the guidance of Father Timothy, these students from Rabinal are studying in a technical school operated by the Somasco Fathers in Guatemala City. They are pictured with Fr. Martin and Fr. Timothy. Fifty other Achi students are enrolled in his computer school in Rabinal.

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in your will,
our legal title is:*



***Province of the Holy Name, Inc.
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2506 Pine Street
P.O. Box 15367
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