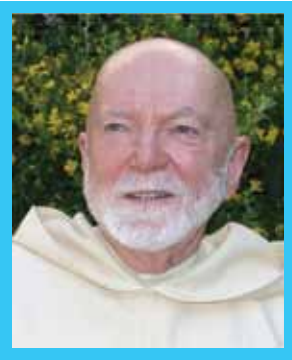


***“Fruit of Thy Womb...
Produce of Thy Soil...”***

(Deut. 7:13)



Dear Mission Friends:

Greetings at the start of May, the month the Church sets aside to honor Our Blessed Mother Mary and all our dear mothers.

“May she who experienced the cares and hardships of earthly life, the weariness of daily toil, the hardships and trials of poverty, and the sorrows of Calvary, come to aid the needs of the Church and the human race. May she graciously lend an ear to the devout pleas of those all over the world who beg her for peace. May she enlighten the minds of those who rule nations. And finally, may she prevail on God, who rules the winds and storms, to calm the tempests in men's warring hearts and grant us

peace in our day. What we seek is true peace grounded on the sturdy foundations of justice and love—on a justice which recognizes the legitimate rights of the weak as well as those of the strong; on a love which keeps men from falling into error through excessive concern for their own interests. Thus each person's rights may be safeguarded without the rights of others being forgotten or violated.”

This is an excerpt from the Encyclical, *“On Prayers During May for Preservation of Peace,”* written by Pope Paul VI in April 1965!

I would also like to share with you how the month of May is spent at our missions in Guatemala, which Fr. Timothy Conlan recorded for us last year.

In Our Blessed Mother's love,
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

Normally the time after Easter is when the Church takes a breather and restores its energy after the long and arduous labors of Lent and Holy Week, at peace in



Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

the happy thought that Jesus is present in our midst. Here in Rabinal, however, there is no rest.

Shortly after Easter we begin the celebration of the feast of St. Peter Martyr, which has a confraternity here in town, and just after that we start a chain of celebrations of the feast of the Holy Cross. This feast day honors Jesus' obedience to His Father in Heaven by His acceptance of suffering and death on the tree of the cross, thereby restoring to all the chance for salvation and eternal life with God.

There are ten neighborhood chapels in Rabinal itself which celebrate the feast day with games and competitions on horseback or bicycle, often blocking the streets. In



St. Peter Martyr Feast Day celebration.

In addition, almost every one of the forty outlying villages has its own confraternity of the Holy Cross and celebrates with its own regional dances, such as the *Costeña o los Animales*. So we have to begin three weeks before the official May 3rd feast day of the Holy Cross in order to be able to travel to each village's celebration.

This year only two of the three priests were here for most of the fiesta days, so it was a lot of celebrating, in addition to keeping our regular Mass schedule in the colonial church. One day alone I celebrated five Masses and the other priest six!

Some might wonder why the feast of the Holy Cross has entered so profoundly and completely into the scheme of life here in Guatemala. I believe it fits in so well here,

and indeed among the native peoples in all of Latin America, because of the culture's intimate connection with the seasons and farming. In May is when the community prays for a strong rain, and as soon as their prayers are answered, they plant the corn, their life. In much of Mayan art there are symbolic depictions of blood from sacred game falling on the earth and giving forth to stalks of corn.



Celebrating at the chapel in one of the villages.

The Holy Cross, then, is seen as the tree of life, and the blood of Jesus, the life-giving rain.

At the heart of each Holy Cross celebration here is a special cross, seen as the tree of life, painted green with colorful flowers. At the foot of the cross, which is mounted on a small platform, is a figure of Jesus holding the world in His hands, with a small cross attached to the top of the globe. At each corner of the platform is a colorful angel wearing a halo or crown; one of the angels carries a book.

Each year a new family accepts the duty of guarding the cross at their house during the year and providing the feast at the end. The night before the celebration, members of the confraternity bring the cross from the house to the chapel, where they keep vigil until midnight and then sleep there on pine needles until dawn. A large drum and a flute player, and if funds allow, a marimba, have accompanied them on their procession and continue to play

Setting up the Marimba.

all night. What a pleasant experience to go to sleep to the sounds of the marimba off in the distance!

The most important part of the celebration is the Mass, which is entering into dialogue with the people to affirm their faith. During the consecration, the drum begins and is joined by the flute player in haunting melodies, as *bombas* (firecrackers) explode overhead with a thunderous roar. After Communion, there is a simple ceremony in which the couple who currently heads the confraternity, the *mayordomos*, passes on the staff of authority to a new couple. Each couple receives a blessing from the priest as the staff is passed, and everyone is invited to applaud.

After Mass, all are served a drink called *atole*, made from corn gruel and either sweet cacao syrup or chile. The priest receives a hearty bowl of chicken and broth, nourishing him for his journey to the next village. Outside, more *bombas* explode, the waiting dancers begin their show, and there is food for the whole village for two days (usually a large pig or two, and endless tamales), all of this being paid for by the *mayordomos* who just handed over their staff. Luckily they are often helped by others who are able and generous.

I must add that before all the Masses in honor of the feast of the Holy Cross, there are many Masses dedicated to praying for rain; and then just after planting, there are many more Masses giving thanks for the rain and planting.

Celebration Dance: Costeña o los Animales

After Mass for rain.

Now it may seem like we pray for and celebrate things that have only to do with the material world, but we are actually showing our hunger for the life of eternity. By uniting to hear the Word of God, we are celebrating the continued existence of the shared community of faith, which is the principal fruit that Jesus' coming has produced.

Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

Mary, Mother of Mankind

*Mother, I commend and entrust to you
all that goes to make up earthly progress,
asking that it should not be one-sided,
but that it should create conditions for
the full spiritual advancement of
individuals, families, communities, and nations.
I commend to you the poor, the suffering,
the sick and the handicapped,
the aging and the dying.
I ask you to reconcile those in sin,
to heal those in pain, and to uplift
those who have lost their hope and joy.
Show to those who struggle in doubt
the light of Christ your Son. Amen.*