



Volume 15, Issue 6

Christmas 2015

Dear Friends,

The day after my arrival to Santiago Ixcán on December 12th, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a mother and child arrived. It wasn't a silent night, it was mid afternoon and hot in the Ixcán jungle. Without my knowing, though, it was holy.

She told me her name was Magdalena. She was thin and worn, a look of desperation etched in her face. The baby's name was Maria. I had never seen her before and I could tell from her features that she wasn't from Santiago Ixcán. "What can I do for you?" I asked after offering her a glass of water.

She related her sad story, needing to talk as much as needing money to supply milk that her breasts didn't have. The three-month-old baby wasn't hers. It was her sister's from San Juan Ixcán, a neighboring village. Her sister died three days after giving birth to the child. "I didn't think that I would be raising my sister's child," she said, and broke down weeping, her hands covering her face.

I listened, tears blurring my eyes. Before dying, her sister had commended the baby to be placed into Magdalena's care. The child's father had left the family months prior for another woman. I learned later that the remaining four other children had been sent to an orphanage somewhere in the country.

Magdalena and her husband are from Barillas, Huehuetenango, about four hours' drive northwest of here. They came to Santiago Ixcán three years ago to pick cardamom and never left. They earn very little money and struggle to feed their family of five. Now with the new baby they are faced with the added burden on their already stretched resources. Magdalena explained, "We barely have enough food to eat. Sometimes we don't. The baby is crying a lot. I came here hoping you could help."



Helping is what we do and this is just one of a string of needs I've encountered since my return. My life here of ministry looks a lot like the corporal and spiritual works of mercy:

Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Comfort the imprisoned. Visit the sick. Bury the dead. Admonish sinners. Instruct the uninformed. Counsel the doubtful. Comfort the sorrowful. Be patient with those in error. Forgive offenses. And pray for the living and the dead.

I've been walking with Magdalena and little Maria for a few weeks now. We are trying ways to increase her breast milk production in addition to providing the weekly supplemental milk formula. In return, she is washing clothes for me at the river one morning a week. She no longer looks desperate and she graces my life with her humble goodness.

This is "Christmas" all year long. Father Donald Haggerty says it well: "In giving food to the hungry, whether we realize it or not, we place ourselves before the concealed presence of Christ himself, who has chosen to become one with the poor." (Reflection December 23rd, *The Magnificat Year of Mercy Companion*.)

Thank you for your prayers and generosity allowing me to walk with the poor ones of the Ixcán. It is both challenge and gift. May you and yours be graced and blessed in this Christmas Season and in 2016! We remember you in our prayers.

Paz y Bien (Peace and All Good).

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



Mission Update:

Kathy returned sooner than planned to Guatemala due to Miguel Solis's untimely death and Javier Gonzalez's (onsite administrator) gall stone surgery. Kathy's mom, Joell, continues to journey in cancer treatment and is holding steady.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries provides a prayerful, pastoral presence through lay missionaries living in solidarity with the poor of the remote Ixcán jungle of Guatemala to learn from as well as to assist both spiritually and materially the people with whom life and ministry are shared. The organization strives to be a bridge between two cultures and nations allowing for the exchange of varying gifts between the rich and poor for the ultimate purpose of empowerment and transformation of lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. You may contact us at:

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