



*This is the gate to Life; those who know Love shall enter through it.
- Psalm 118*

Dear Friends,

It is the liturgical season of Lent, the forty days before Easter when the Christian faithful focus on the passion and death of Jesus and are invited to look deeper at one's life and repent by fasting, praying, giving alms, and doing works of mercy. The point is conversion; to turn from a path on which one has gone astray, to a whole turning to God, to Easter, to Resurrection.

My friend Berta, who also works in full-time ministry in the Ixcán, texts me daily videos or short blurbs with a spiritual message. One of the things she has been sending recently is Reto Cuaresmal -Lenten Challenges- Reto 7 was to Visit a Sick Person.

Recently, after an evening prayer service, Santos Chali, a catechist and almost ordained priest (instead he married a young woman from our village) invited all present to visit his older brother, Mauricio, who was suffering with advanced liver cancer. Mauricio lives in Buena Vista, a small village a distance away, and transportation was needed. I offered the mission truck, the 1994 red four-wheel drive pickup I call Gitana 2 (after Gitana 1, my deceased mule) with the conditions that I could find a licensed chauffeur to drive us and we would leave from Playa Grande (an hour and a half away from Santiago Ixcán) after a morning parish formation there.

Miguel, the best chauffeur in the village, agreed to drive us. The parish formation ended at noon and we took off with catechists Diego, Nicolas, Jesus and Eucharistic Minister Petrona and her 16-year-old daughter Katy in the back of the truck and Javier, Miguel and I in the cab. Santos drove his motorcycle to guide us to Buena Vista as he planned to stay overnight.

We stopped first at a local gas station, grabbed a bite to eat, used the bathroom and filled the gas tank.

We sped without difficulty on the wide paved main road for ten minutes, then on gravel for another fifteen. At the turn off for Buena Vista, the wide road changed to narrow, from gravel to dirt, and we bumped along for another thirty-five minutes passing through small Q'eqchi villages flanked by thick vegetation, and acres of African Palm trees and corn.



Santos finally stopped in front of a modest home of wood boards. We piled out of the truck and he led us silently to the house. We entered through a door leading into a room hidden by a hanging thin faded pink sheet. It was like passing from a world of vibrancy into a world of shadow where 42-year-old Mauricio lay, his greyish tinted skin stretched tightly over his emaciated face, his features sharp, his black hair thinned now; yet his dark brown eyes shown a quiet light, his gaze gentle.

We each passed by his bedside to shake his hand. As I lightly touched his arm he said to me, "You are Katy." I smiled surprised that he knew me. "Yes, I am," I replied. He must have recognized me from my early years in pastoral ministry when I was more visible throughout the entire parish.

We filled the small room sitting on the plastic stools and chairs; then Santos shared with us about Mauricio's life. We learned that he is the father of six children whose ages range from twenty to five, and that his wife had left him early on during the illness. "He is fighting alone now," informed Santos. Mauricio's 18-year-old daughter cares for him and her siblings now.

Mauricio is the main catechist of this small, remote village and like his father Pablo and his brother Santos he is a preacher and a faith leader. I noted that an open Bible lay at his side near his head, the Word of God that has guided his life that he has preached and taught, not far from his touch.

We opened in prayer and I moved to the bed and sat beside him. As spontaneous petitions in raised voices streamed from the lips of all, I poured on Mauricio's forehead drops of blessed water from a small plastic bottle; a gift years ago from a cancer patient who had returned from a pilgrimage bringing the holy waters of Lourdes back with her to the clinic in Seattle where I was working. Mauricio lifted his printed white T-shirt exposing his extended abdomen. I dripped more holy water and laid my hand there on the hardened area of his stomach. He was clearly dying. When the wave of prayers stopped, I returned to my seat.

Then he spoke words I will not forget; words of conviction, words of faith. In a firm voice he declared, "I am waiting on God's will. Either I will live to give testimony or I will die to live in eternity. One of these two mysteries has to manifest. I am waiting to know, but one of these will manifest."

Then he raised his right thin arm covering his eyes and began to weep. "Thank you for visiting me, thank you for your sacrifice in coming so far. I have no way to repay you, but God will repay you. Thank you. Thank you..." We all sat there stunned, unable to speak, unable to move.

But then I did. I returned to the side of his bed and said, "Mauricio you have blessed us." I bowed my head and placed his large thin hand on my head to receive God's blessing through this holy man.

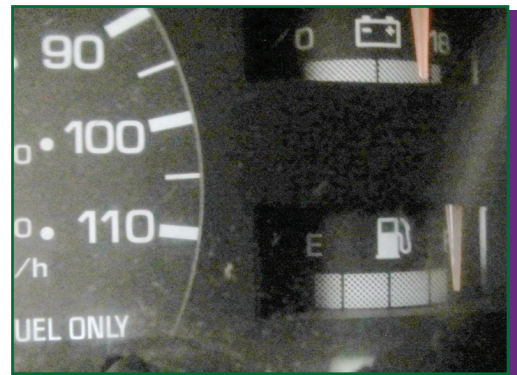
As we left his bedroom that afternoon to return to the land of Ixcán sun and heat; I glanced back before parting through the curtain and saw there a man of God as purified gold in the fire.

When we arrived back to Playa Grande, Javier in the cab said, "The gas gauge hasn't moved. It still is on FULL. How can that be?" Miguel and I blew it off. "Oh it will move," I said.

But it didn't. As we pulled up to the mission house in Santiago Ixcán after dropping everyone else off, I said, "Look Miguel, the gas gauge is still on FULL after driving for almost three hours!?" We both looked at each other and smiled. "Well, either the gauge is broke or God multiplied the gas."

The gauge did move the next day as I drove the pickup in the village. But not much.

Just as the tank of the truck remained FULL that Lenten day, so did our spirits; blessed by a man destined for Resurrection.



Sincerely,

Kathy Snider

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries is a Christian lay mission serving as a ministry of presence with the Maya people in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. We act as a bridge between cultures for the exchange of gifts to transform lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible.

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