



"Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received -- only what you have given." -St. Francis of Assisi

The forty days of the liturgical season of Lent are underway when Catholics are encouraged to focus on the passion and death of Jesus. With help from the practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving we are invited to take a deeper look at our lives, in an on-going conversion of hearts and minds as we prepare for Easter Resurrection.

Thinking about almsgiving as a response to the teachings of Jesus that encourage us to reach out to people in need, not only with our money but also with our time and talents, I ponder the scripture in Matthew 25: 34-36, 40. Fr. Richard Thomas, S.J. (d.), called these words of Jesus as "The Final Exam."

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.... Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

The final exam comes after a lifetime of the daily ways that the poor—the hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick, and imprisoned brothers and sisters come to us in their many faces and situations and we are graded on how we respond.

Vilia Morales, a friend in her early 50s, has come to us over the years. The father of her two pre-teen twin daughters, abandoned them early on, leaving her to fend for them on her own. A member of our Ixcán Creations jewelry and luchadora women's groups, she continues to show resilience and faith. But now she faces an even harder challenge - breast cancer.



Vilia and Carmen

Diagnosis and treatment of serious illnesses here is extremely challenging due to poverty, the distance to facilities, poor infrastructure, compromised healthcare systems, etc. But she said, "I want to live. I want to be here for my daughters." So, she began the long trail of doctoring, which took her to Playa Grande then to Coban and finally to the General Hospital for the poor 12 hours away in Guatemala City.

Money is scarce for everyone now due to the two years of drought that wilted the cardamom crops, a main source of cash income, apart from money sent from family members working in the United States. Alone, Vilia looks to her family for economic help to defray health care costs. Her two sisters and six brothers are stretched financially themselves. Even more devastating for the family, her younger sister, Catarina, is battling advanced uterine cancer as well!

I learned later that Vilia had traveled to Guatemala City alone to have a biopsy done due to the extra travel costs of another person. She was told the biopsy results would be given two months later and would require another long trip to Guatemala City in March! I knew for this appointment she could not be alone. Due to my schedule I couldn't go with her, but we sent Carmen Jimenez, Ixcán Ministries' representative, to accompany her.

Two days prior to the appointment, Vilia and Carmen left Santiago Ixcán at 5:00 a.m. for Playa Grande, then took a minivan to Coban and finally a bus to Guatemala City. Once there, they hired a taxi to lodging in Zone 1, found a lab to do the ordered imaging tests the next day, then another taxi to Zone 18 to lodging in a cheaper hotel near the hospital. On the day of the appointment, they walked in the dark from the hotel to the hospital to stand in line at 5:00 a.m.

The fear of the unknown, the confusion and lostness felt in the maze of transfers of vehicles, clinic laboratories, the early morning wait in the not-so- safe darkness of Guatemala City and finding the next room in the three-story huge hospital I know was made bearable by Carmen's steady presence. "If I would have been alone, I would have sat down and cried," recounted Vilia. "Thank you so much for Carmen. With her we found our way. I don't know what I would have done without her this trip."

Vilia received her first intravenous chemotherapy treatment (one of possible eight) in order for the tumor to be diminished before they will operate. The chemotherapy will be done in three-week intervals. "I'm scared. This illness is costing so much," she said.

Thank you for helping us help Vilia in her fight for her life.

New life awaits.

May you and yours have a most blessed Holy Week leading to Easter Resurrection. He is alive!

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider

Mission Update:

The Ixcán region is entering the dry season when the rain diminishes and the heat index climbs. Apart from the cardamom crop failure, many of the people's corn crops were compromised by a plague that swept through the area. Our outreach and education programs are in place and operating. Kathy has extended her Catholic pastoral outreach (visits with prayer and scripture sharing) to four communities in the area. Guatemala continues to face challenges stemming from issues connected to corruption and injustice which the people are non-violently protesting by blocking main roads throughout the country. Kathy is scheduled to return to the U.S. in June.

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.

Our programs include- Scholarships, Community Library, Women's Micro-business, Medical, Housing, and Food Assistance, Spiritual and Pastoral Accompaniment, and Promotion of Peace and Justice.

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

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