



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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Eye on the True Prize

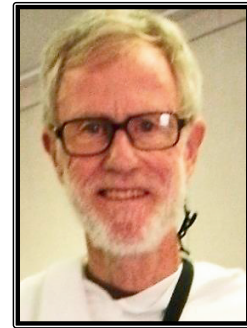
*Winning, winning, winning—a refrain in vogue,
Signaling today's contentious competition in every arena:
Gamblers placing big money in the heavyweight title bout;
Contestants on a game show hoping to win a better life;
Students in search of a scholarship in some lucrative career;
Political parties and candidates in the richest country in the world,
Doing whatever it takes to win;
Religious preachers spreading messages to attract rich adherents.
Winning is an all-consuming passion in human endeavor,
But is it the path to peace, wisdom, and joy?*

*As I peer off into the distance, down a dusty, rutted mountain road,
I envision the white-washed twin towers of the colonial church,
Dwarfing the lilliputian cars, pedestrians, and market sellers,
All of it set against the grey stone face and brown skirts
Of the hills to the north on which the precolonial fortress of Kayjup
Stands out, totally abandoned and crumbling,
Mute testimony to this once great Mayan Achi indigenous people
Who defended their land against the tribe of Quiche
And then lost it to the Spanish conquest.*

*The road into Rabinal from the church is across two mountain passes,
With ascents rising to 6,000 feet above sea level
And descents by way of precarious slopes and devastating slides.
Most of the year the valley appears to be an alkaline desert,
Its dry river beds filled with ancient rocks,
Its former areas of dense forest mostly cleared to produce corn.*

*Some still hang on to the hope that their multicolored culture,
United with the traditions of the ancient Catholic faith,
Will transcend the impoverished state of their economy and lives.
They see the white gleaming face of that colonial church to be
The face of Christ, present in the heart of everyone united in that faith.
We call it the Church, the community of believers in God Emmanuel,
Jesus of Nazareth, true God and true man, whose goal was
To win the conflict over the evil of greed, lust, and lies
And build an ever-expanding universe of fraternity and love.
Jesus took the path of self-sacrifice and service to humankind.
He offers us his victory as proof that he can give us his Spirit;
In the gathering of his family, we find him in each one.*

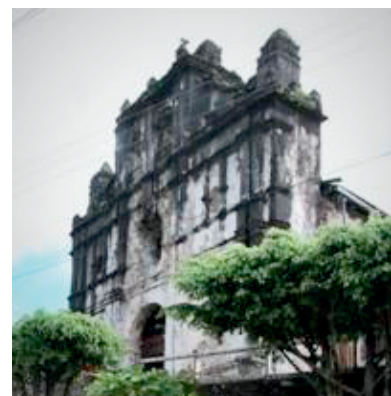
Poverty, Pandemics, and Possibilities



*Fr.
Timothy
Conlan,
O.P.*

Dear Mission Friends:

I had planned to report on how our poverty-stricken country of Guatemala was combatting the coronavirus. But after several weeks of unavoidable, round-the-clock news on it, I realized that I was searching the internet for just about any other topic and figured you would probably be feeling the same way. So I will try and spare you—not that it is not important or that I could not enlighten you about our daily struggles here, and certainly it needs to be recorded and evaluated, but let me leave that to the history books.



*Church
of
San
Agustin,
built in
1574.*

To demonstrate how desperate I was to find some relief from news on the threat to our health, when I saw a headline that monkeys in Thailand had invaded a town square and got into a huge brawl, I immediately wanted to know what was going on. It turns out that groups of monkeys inhabiting two different Buddhist temples, hungry because the temples had been closed to visitors whose custom it was to feed them, ventured out into the square to look for food. But like two rival gangs, they started a brawl until the townspeople came out to feed them.

While this silly, tucked-away story was a refreshing break, it turns out that it was still pandemic-related. But trust me—from this point on, I plan to spare you from providing any lengthy descriptions of how we are handling the crisis here. Of course, the government is taking extreme measures to limit entrance to the country. And, as with all of you, a pall has settled on our town. We have been prohibited from large public gatherings—no more of our world-famous processions and street decorations and the tourism they bring; no in-person Masses, baptisms, or marriages; and funerals are limited to a handful of mourners. But I will not elaborate.

There was that one Sunday during Lent, however, when I went to celebrate the 6:30 a.m. Mass in the parish colonial church, which I have been doing every week for at least the last 18 years to a congregation of one thousand.



But I found myself looking out on a vacant church—the only other people were the three behind me assisting with the readings and the altar serving roles. The mic at the altar was hooked up to broadcast the Mass on our parish radio station, but with the sound of the mic turned off in the church to decrease the echo, I felt like I was talking to myself. There is so much to get used to.

Then there was the Sunday I narrowly escaped a run-in with the law. It was the first day of the mandate of curfew, prohibiting anyone from being on the street between 4:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m. I was at the *Jovenes Arriba* office, alone and lost in my work, oblivious to the time. Glancing at the clock at 3:50, I suddenly remembered the curfew and made a mad dash to close up, raced out the door, jumped on my bicycle and pedaled furiously to get home. It was eerie to see the streets deserted and people standing in their doorways, watching to see who would be arrested.

At exactly 4:00 I heard the siren of a passing patrol car as I disappeared into the house. I was lucky.

But that's it—no more pandemic talk.

A few weeks ago, a group of catechists (*above*) paid me a visit at the office to petition my help in building a chapel in their village. *Santa Rosa de Pichec*, about four miles from our town center, boasts nine Protestant chapels, but the Catholics only have use of a tiny health center for celebrating. According to these catechists, about seven years ago they attended an outdoor Mass I was celebrating and I told them that I would help them build a chapel on that spot when they were ready to get serious—with plans drawn up and the required papers from the diocese.

Well, I don't recall talking to them, but here they were, papers in hand, along with well-designed plans for a space large enough to hold 200, so I agreed to help them.

And with assistance from their community, they have so far raised enough to get the walls up. Much of their aid, however, was to come from family members sending money from the U.S., but in this global economic downturn (Oops, I did it again...), they too are suffering, and so construction has stalled.

I have reported in my last few letters that agronomy is one of the most promising areas of study for my scholarship students, one that is sorely needed in this harsh land and environment and also one that helps to keep the students living in their community and applying what they have learned.

A key component of the scholarship program for agronomy is a work program by which I find jobs for the students Monday through Friday, leaving the weekends free for studying. This works well for students in their second or third year who have some learning under their belts and can offer businesses more than a day worker could, but not so much for first year students.

So I put on my thinking cap and decided to set up our own farm. (Other than helping with a victory garden my family had during World War II when I was 6 years old, I have never grown anything in my life! But as you know, I will try anything to prove that we can do amazing things with a little creative thinking, hard work, and God's help.)



A very generous donor stepped up with the \$1,500.00 I needed for the initial investment. First I had to rent a piece of land near a creek, invest in a motor and tubing to pump water to the field and distribute it by droplets to the plants, buy fertilizer, pesticide, a hand pump, a wheel barrel, etc., not to mention the seeds—the list gets long.

The plan is that I provide the work and pay the students a salary like a loan. Then they pay back the loan with sales from their harvest in the market, which gives them useful experience in negotiating.

I also charge them rent for the motor pump and other equipment so they learn about business expenses, but all other profits are theirs.

The first student (*top*) to take advantage of this program is smart, works hard, and is just a delight. He comes from a very poor family—his father is a day laborer who makes \$6.00 a day when there is work—and so he has been especially eager to listen and learn. I made it clear that it is his project and I am just assisting, but I have been offering my help when I can, such as it is, to discourage him from getting help from his friends, whom he would have to pay.



Breaking up ground with a pick to plant vegetables or corn is not easy work when you are my age, and I have sore muscles that I didn't know existed. It is probably comical to see the two of us working—I give four good strokes the width of the row, then stop and watch the birds in the trees while he keeps swinging for 30 more strokes, finishing seven rows. He is inexhaustible while also kindly making sure I don't overdo it.

I'll let you know how much we reap from what we have sown. At this moment we are excluded from selling at the public marketplace, which has been pared down to avoid big crowds, so we will have to be creative once again. (Sorry, I really did try to avoid the topic!)

Indeed, my scholarship program for youths in general is suffering from the economic downturn in the U.S. **Certainly the unavoidable ramifications from Covid 19 have permeated every area of all of our lives. But if anyone out there is interested in what we are doing and able to help, come on board.**

Pray for us here and be assured of my prayers for all of you. Let us pray especially for the Lord to bless us with his strength, courage, and resilience in enduring and triumphing over this hardship in all of its varied manifestations.

Peace,
Father Timothy

Prayer for Healing to Our Patron, St. Martin de Porres

*You were a healer of many sick people
in your time, O St. Martin.
You gave your patients medicines
coming from herbs and plants,
and most of all,
you healed them through your prayers
and the touch of your hands.
How people ran after you
in search for healing!*

*I kneel down before you
seeking your help
for the many infirmities that I encounter
in myself and in others.
I know that we have to carry
our daily cross,
and part of this is
to embrace wholeheartedly
our sickness and our pains.*

*Heal my fears which are
the most terrible of my sicknesses.
Obtain for us from God the pardon of
every sin and the health of mind and body
necessary for our state in life.*

*Intercede for all who are sick
and for all who lovingly tend the sick,
and give them comfort and care
and support in their hour of need.*

*Help us to use with wisdom
and with a thankful heart
the health and strength God gives us
so that, following your example,
our whole lives may be
a song of thanksgiving and of praise
to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*