

Who Finds a Friend, Finds a Treasure

- brother Daniel

*Let your love be sincere.
Rejoice with others when they rejoice,
and be sad with those in sorrow.
Treat everyone with equal kindness.
Never be condescending,
but make real friends with the poor.*

- Rom. 12, 15-16

IT HAD BEEN A LONG TRIP IN THOSE STIFLING VANS OVER a hazardous winding road in the mountains of the Sierra Huasteca, in Mexico. After the precarious ride, the brothers walked uphill through a worn path towards a remote rural village. Everybody felt rewarded by the stunning view: a sea of multi-layered, green hues extended far and wide over the lush valleys below!

The villagers were extraordinarily hospitable. There was a big flower arch at the entrance of the village reading “*Bienvenidos hermanos*” – Welcome brothers. There were children running and dogs barking while an off-pitch band played a musical rendition that repeated itself on and on. We discovered that some village folks had walked for hours on those mountain paths simply to arrive, say hello and shake hands before they had to go back to their hamlets!

Our Benedictine sisters had prepared a lovely welcome with the people. We ourselves were hot, sweaty and hungry. As the welcome proceeded, one of the brothers decided to inquire discretely about the food. He leaned towards a young woman sitting on the bench and asked her: “*¿Tienes hambre?*” – Spanish for “Are you hungry?” However, with his English accent, it sounded more like “*¿Tienes hombre?*” – which in Spanish means: “Do you have a man?” The young woman hastily got up and disappeared! We never saw her again . . .

After many years, both sisters and brothers still laugh as we recall the awkward incident, which has become part of the myth of those adventures when both communities were young and energetic! How in the world would a monastic community from northern New England find itself in such an improbable setting?

The year 2013 marks 60 years since the founding of our monastery. I wonder, as I reflect with gratitude for all the people who, through the years, have touched our lives: What kind of monastic community would we have become if we had not met our Mexican Benedictine Sis-



brothers and sisters in the chapel of El Ojite, Hidalgo, Mexico, 1987

ters? Their gentle influence has been a 37 year old, ongoing invitation to conversion. The Weston brothers have experienced in their midst the reality of the Gospel among the poor of Latin America.

Our sisters have opened our eyes and our hearts in the diverse places where they live and work: amidst slums of earthquake stricken towns, arid villages of impoverished peasants, refugee camps in cold mountains, hurricane ravaged communities of farmers, and among prisoners in jail.

With the sisters, we befriended indigenous leaders who, defending their communal lands, had been abducted and tortured. We sang and wept among injured children who were victims of exploding land mines in Nicaragua. We experienced piercing fear as we listened to Mayan families harassed by death squads in the militarized area of the highlands of Chiapas.

All these experiences have truly educated us in our monastic journey, showing us a new way to read scripture, to practice hospitality, to become brothers to the poor, and to appreciate the leadership of women.

Above all, the love and tenderness of the sisters themselves have prodded us in the ways of simplicity and attentiveness, even in the midst of struggle and distress. In those moments our common humanity shines through all these difficulties because a mutual trust has emerged between our two communities.

If we experience some concerns, there is engaged conversation, then an “aha!” moment, and finally joyful smiles. Through discernment and dialogue we discover our truth. If there are tears, they last only a few minutes. In the end, the memories of joy and laughter remain for a lifetime. ■