

September 2, 2012 – 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Sr. Madeline Dorsey, MM, Maryknoll, NY

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; Psalms 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Our beautiful opening prayer today embraces the theme running through all the readings: "Almighty God, every good thing comes from you. Fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us."

Moses tells the people to observe the statutes and decrees carefully and thereby give evidence of God's wisdom and intelligence to the nations. The Psalm tells us that the one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord. James states clearly that every worthwhile gift, every genuine benefit comes from above, and to welcome the word that tells us to look after orphans and widows in their distress. Jesus said to the doubting Pharisees that they pay God lip service and their heart is far from him. "Hear me and try to understand."

The simple poor people of El Salvador during that nation's prolonged civil war – which destroyed homes and small properties, killed family members, especially the youth and anyone with potential for leadership, including catechists and Christian community leaders – remained valiant and faithful. Mine was the privilege to live among them and serve them.

I would like to share with you how they could live and sustain a degree of security amidst a war that was never more than a stone's throw away from them. My sister companion and I lived well outside the town of Ilopango [also headquarters to a military base and training center for such troops as those who killed the six Jesuits and two women at the University of Central America (UCA) in 1989]. Counting all the families in the housing, woods, railroad tracts and shacks of the displaced, we numbered upward of 5,000.

The sister with whom I lived organized catechism for children and guided youth work. I organized church-based communities (CEBs) and the church council. We had a number of CEB groups embracing the Scriptures in weekly study and reflection. The depth of their understanding and practical application by these almost illiterate women thrilled me.

When the women were asked what great need they could work toward, their answer was immediate: an herbal garden and medicine, but its cost was beyond them. So the work began. The women's husbands knew they needed to fence in the plot next to our chapel; an experienced city water-worker extended the water line to place a faucet on the outer chapel wall for watering purposes. This helped with chapel cleaning, too. The planting took a little time but the blossoming seemed overnight and their care was tender.

Next came the making of syrups and ointments for which we needed to purchase Vaseline and a few items, which required raising minimal funds. Ingenuity prompted the women to think how well *pupusas*, a popular type of tortilla with filling, toasted over

open fire, would sell after our Saturday night Mass – and did they ever! (Needless to say they are a favorite of mine, too.)

The Archdiocese's health training program obliged with a series of classes for our devoted women workers. A solicitation from Maryknoll and friends back home realized sufficient funds to erect a simple structure to serve as clinic and work area; additionally, we obtained weekly visit from a doctor. So, herbal medicine was available and health care, too, for an impoverished and deserving people.

I want to share another remarkable work started a little later by a young woman, Lupe Calderon, who knew our sisters who were martyred by the Salvadoran National Guard under higher orders in December 1980. Her work could be named a success of nonviolent means in the midst of the horrors of war.

Lupe had received training as a catechist and health worker. She lived in a colony of El Salvador's second largest city where we ministered to an evolving parish and all that implies. In honor of the four martyred church women, she started the [Foundation for the Natural Health of Children and Women Maura Ita Dorothy Jean](#) (Spanish acronym FUSANMIDJ). Participants in the project planted healthful vegetables and fruit gardens to meet the needs of each local area. During the two earthquakes the country suffered after the war ended, she took her women and children to help in the reconstruction of houses. Her work continues but funds are very short.

This reflection was originally published in 2009.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation
200 New York Avenue NW Washington, D.C. 20001 phone: (202)832-1780
ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org