

Closing Reflection

Life is still a struggle, but the Ramos family have been able to send their older children to technical school and even to university. Puentecitos was just the beginning of the process which has been repeated in many of the surrounding communities. Each Thursday afternoon at four o'clock the Puentecitos community meets in the chapel they built together, and they say a prayer for all the supporters of CAFOD who accompanied them along the way.

"Christ used this ceremony, this liturgy of his people, to communicate the beautiful reality he brings to the world. Just as the parched earth longs for water and rain, so too humanity without the life of the Spirit is an arid desert. God is indeed revealed in creatures. When we behold the splendor of the sun, the bountiful harvest, the beauty of an ocean sunset, the majesty of a volcano, the tranquility of a lake, God is revealing himself."
(13/5/1978)

Loving God, as we come to the end of this time of prayer and reflection, deepen our faith in you and our care and concern for the earth you have gifted to us. Help us to treat our world and each other with the same loving care and respect you show to us, as your beloved children. Bless and strengthen those communities who are facing injustice and oppression and open the hearts of all world leaders to act with compassion and give them the will to put right the wrongs they have committed, for the benefit of all. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fidel and Julia with some of their younger children.



CAFOD in partnership with The Archbishop Romero Trust Pilgrimage to Holy Island Saturday 8th July 2023



Photo: Malcolm Bengston

Liturgy Booklet

Our liturgy today comes from the lived experiences of the Ramos Family who live in Puentecitos, Western El Salvador, followed by quotes from Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Please join in with the short prayers in bold type at the end of each reflection.

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Pilgrimage Liturgy: Crossing the Causeway & in St Aidan's Church Opening reflection

Life was hard in the tiny rural hamlet of Puentecitos in Western El Salvador. The community was spared some of the worst impacts of the civil war, but the men and boys had been forced into the army to fight in the distant east of the country. Many families lost their breadwinner and it was a struggle to make ends meet. When Fidel Ramos came back from the war, he married Julia and they planned to raise a family on their tiny plot of rented land on a rugged hillside. The government gave little help to subsistence farmers like Fidel who relied on growing maize and beans to feed the family and raise some income, but a new government programme promised them a better future.

*"Let us think of our fields that need rain; let us think of the harvests we hope for; let us think of the beauty of our countryside and the life of our country. If only we could see these things in all their profundity. And it is precisely to this that God's word invites us today to help us view these realities in their proper perspective. This is the message I would like to highlight for you and for me today, dear radio audience: the message of transcendence."
(31/7/1977)*

(Transcendence means looking toward the eternal, toward God, toward the divine. Only when the material things of the world and the wealth of the earth are viewed in relation to God who created them do they have any meaning. When we view the riches and the goods of the earth without taking God into account, all things are vanity.) (JF)

God our Father, we thank you for the gifts you give us to enrich our lives. Help us to treat the earth and other people with respect and care. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

2nd Reflection

There was to be a free distribution of a new kind of seed which would boost production. But the seeds came with an unexpected twist: they produced a plentiful and healthy crop in the first year but come the time of the next harvest the crop failed. The families of Puentecitos were caught in a trap: instead of being able to replant the new seeds they had to seek loans to buy replacements: they were at the mercy of moneylenders. The villagers were caught in a cycle of debt: if the crops failed, they lost their land and their livelihood. What were they to do?

*"But I do know that God gives the fruits of the earth for everyone. As pastor and in the name of God who creates all things, I say to those who have wealth and to those who labour and to government officials: Be just! Hear the cries of the people! Violence and bloodshed will not resolve any of these economic, social, or political situations! We must deepen our knowledge of these matters so that there are no more tragic weeks and no more sorrows. It is necessary for us all to listen! The people have already waited too long.... God has created these goods for the welfare of the whole community."
(30/10/1977)*

Lord of all, give us courage to oppose injustice and speak out boldly, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are oppressed by those in power. Help us to work towards restoring justice, so all may enjoy the riches you give freely. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

3rd Reflection

"We knew we needed to break free from this kind of farming", said Fidel, "we had to get back to the old ways where we used our native seeds which had adapted to the conditions of our land and weather, and produced an abundant crop year after year". Fidel was a catechist and a community leader, and through the church he heard about the Jesuit development office, supported by CAFOD, who had farming experts who might help. Erasmo, from the Jesuit office, explained how the community would have to work together to build up a store of native seeds, not just to grow maize and beans, but to manage their land to produce a whole range of vegetables and fruit which would improve their diet and their health and would give them some protection against crop failure or the cycle of droughts and floods which ruined their harvests.

*"When Paul VI said that there was a need to renew the church and that this was the goal of the Second Vatican Council, he made it very clear that renewal doesn't mean yielding to the sometimes unchristian ways of the modern world. Renewal means making the church coherent with the seed that was planted. A tree, however much it grows, remains coherent with its seed. What matters, then, is realizing that God's word is a seed and that it cannot be altered. We might like a teaching that is more in keeping with our interests; we might like preaching that isn't so bothersome, that doesn't cause conflicts. But when Christ planted the seed, he had conflicts because that seed is the word of the Just and the Holy One, the One who knows what he wants in creating humanity and nature, and so it crashes against sin and against those who don't want to let the seed grow."
(16/7/1978)*

Father, we thank you for those you send to help us in our need, when life is hard and we can't find a way forward. We are grateful for the help and care you give to us through others. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

4th Reflection

Everything is linked said Erasmo: our relationships are broken: our work is about restoring those relationships, within our family, with the community, with the land and with God. Over the last fifteen years the people of Puentecitos have been working together in a farming process known as "agro-ecology", using native seeds, planting living barriers of plants to bind the soil and prevent erosion and flood damage, preparing natural compost with no chemical additives or pesticides, creating a virtuous circle to care for our common home.

*"But I say that there is a higher authority that imposes order; there is a moral force which requires the equitable sharing of the product of our earth which God wants to be truly for the benefit of all."
(29/10/1978)*

*"So, the material world is for everyone, without borders. Like a common table with tablecloths long enough for everyone, like the Eucharist. Each person has his or her own stool. So, everyone comes to the table with the tablecloth - and everyone brings something of themselves."
(Rutilio Grande,13.2.1977)*

Let us work together to bind up hearts that are broken and to rebuild our relationships with each other, with the earth and with you, Our Lord and Father, Amen.