

and activities for children. I would hear confessions. Each evening, the day would end with Mass.

On Holy Thursday, during the Mass of the Lord's Supper, I had the privilege of washing feet - feet that had walked difficult, dusty roads for many years. Later that night, I washed my own dirty, tired feet before going to bed. I was reminded of the words of our Constitutions:

As disciples of Jesus, we stand side by side with all people. Like them we are burdened by the same struggles and beset by the same weaknesses; like them we are made new by the same Lord's love; like them we hope for a world where justice and love prevail.
(Constitution 212)

On Good Friday, I shared in the traditional *Via Crucis* - the Way of the Cross - walking from village to village as we prayed. As we passed through the countryside, people hurried from their homes to join the procession, joining their suffering and brokenness to that of Jesus. Eventually, we arrived at the chapel in Santiago, where Jesus was crucified. How moving it was to see the Gospel come to life in such a real way.

In the evening, we gathered for the Celebration of the Lord's Passion. When it came time for the Adoration of the Cross. I expected a steadily moving line: genuflect, kiss the Cross, and head back to your seat. Instead, the Adoration of the Cross lasted well over an hour.

People really adored the Cross. Some approached on their knees. Others prostrated themselves. Each gaze was fixed intently on the Cross. I watched as the people adored their own suffering, professing their faith that it is in the moment when our human suffering and brokenness is joined to that of Jesus on the cross that we realize our salvation.

Our mission concluded with the Easter Vigil. Light spread throughout the chapel, and the clanging bell echoed through the village as we sang the Gloria. The Gospel proclaimed the empty tomb and the hope of the resurrection.

Christ was anointed to bring good news to the poor, release for prisoners, sight for the blind, restoration for every broken victim. Our efforts, which are his, reach out to the afflicted and in a preferential way to the poor and the oppressed. We come not just as servants, but as their neighbors, to be with them and of them. It is not that we take sides against sinful enemies. Before God, all of us are sinners and none is an enemy. We stand with the poor and afflicted because only from there can we appeal as Jesus did for the conversion and deliverance of all.
(Constitution 213)

I love being part of this missionary congregation. Holy Week in México was a beautiful experience of our God, who crosses over into the world in order that we might cross over into the Kingdom of God.

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MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

Across Borders of Every Sort:
Holy Week in Mexico

by Rev. Mark DeMott, C.S.C.

From the beginning, the Congregation of Holy Cross has been a missionary congregation. Soon after founding the community, Blessed Basil Moreau, C.S.C., sent sisters, brothers, and priests from France to Algeria (1840), the United States (1841), Canada (1847), Italy (1850), and to East Bengal (1852) to present-day Bangladesh. Our Constitutions explain:

Our mission sends us across borders of every sort. Often we must make ourselves at home among more than one people or culture, reminding us again that the farther we go in giving the more we stand to receive. Our broader experience allows both the appreciation and the critique of every culture and the disclosure that no culture of this world can be our abiding home. (Constitution 217)

On May 13, 1857, Pope Pius IX approved the first Constitutions and recognized Holy Cross as a religious congregation of pontifical right. This recognition was due in large part to Holy Cross' missionary identity - specifically to Father Moreau's willingness to assume responsibility for the Church's mission in East Bengal.

Some missions failed. Others thrived. In addition to these early foundations, Holy Cross communities have been established in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Haiti, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, India and most recently in the Philippines.

In March, I crossed the United States' southern border to serve Holy Cross' newest parish in México: San José

(Saint Joseph) Parish in Tamán. Located northeast of México City, in the mountains of San Luis Potosí, the parish serves about ten thousand people in Tamán - and many more in more than fifty-five rural chapels in smaller villages scattered in the river valley and on the mountainside. Father Marin Hernandez Campos, C.S.C., serves the parish, visiting each village about once a month.



Twice each year - once during Holy Week and again in the summer - the seminarians and staff from the Holy Cross Casa de Formación in Monterrey, México coordinate a week-long mission trip. Often, these border-crossing *misiones*

serve San José Parish. This March, we organized three mission teams composed of Holy Cross seminarians, Holy Cross priests, Holy Cross sisters, and lay collaborators from a Holy Cross parish near the Casa de Formación. I had the privilege of serving as the priest for one of the teams.



From Monterrey, we traveled eleven hours by bus, arriving in Tamán on the evening of Saturday, March 19 - just in time to join in the celebration of the Feast of Saint Joseph, the patronal feast of Parroquia San José. The feast day Mass was followed by live music and dancing in the town square and a spectacular fireworks display.

The next morning, on Palm Sunday, my team traveled in a pickup truck to the village of Santiago, nestled high in the mountains. The bell at the chapel began to ring. The Catholic Christian community gathered, palm branches in hand. Here, the procession didn't depend upon palms shipped from somewhere

in the tropics and carefully stored in a cooler until Mass-goers arrived. These were real branches, gathered from the roadsides of daily life, and ready to welcome Jesus into their midst. One of the women presented me with a palm branch from her home. Singing and dancing, we processed from the village square, through the streets, and up a hill to the chapel. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Holy Week - La Semana Santa - and our mission had begun.

Each morning during Holy Week, I would hike through the mountains to visit the sick in their homes. Many of these *enfermos* hadn't seen a priest in months. Many of the older people in the region don't speak Spanish, so I quickly learned a few words in Nahuatl - the indigenous language of the region - to hear confessions. Toteco mitzla popolhuiz miyac ... I absolve you of all of your sins ... Families would gather, joining together in prayer as their loved ones received the sacraments of anointing and Eucharist. One woman, very near death, kept reaching out with both hands. Her eyes were fixed on heaven - on something beyond this world. She was ready to be carried across that final border and into God's eternal embrace.

In the afternoons, our mission team would offer programs at the chapel in Santiago - there were talks for adults, group conversations for young adults,