

Winter, 2010

To the many who have cared,

Necessity dictates that I spend most of my time in Guatemala at present. My responsibilities running the program, as well my role as father figure and mentor to our youngsters and children, require that my journeys home be occasional and brief. As such my stays in the Boston area are well thought out and planned in advance, to enable me to make the most of what little time I have here. Even so there are times when, despite our best intentions, all does not go as hoped.

I recently returned home in mid-November for two and a half weeks. As often the case when I am here, my agenda was full and my time was over-burdened. Then just four days after my return, with much of what I needed to accomplish still before me, I fell while rushing to cross a busy street and fractured my collarbone. I needed to rethink things in every imaginable way.

I have found that when faced with obstacles or a sudden change of plans, logistics can usually be worked out with a minimum of effort and a good bit of determination. Friends and family quickly came forward to offer time and assistance in whatever way they could. With their help, I quickly revised my plans and devised new ways to complete my tasks, enabling me both to fulfill my responsibilities to Only A Child and to get the rest I needed to restore my health. I soon made peace with my situation and resolved to make the most of the unexpected change of events.

Not long after injuring myself, I confessed to my mother that although I wished that I had not been hurt, I could still appreciate that there were advantages to the changes that had been forced on me as a result. In the Christian tradition, the season of Advent marks the month leading up to Christmas Day. The Advent season is a time of reflection during which we await and contemplate the approaching birth of Jesus. As such the Advent season requires that we set aside time to prepare to welcome Him into the world and into our lives.

Given the hectic pace of life today, it is often a challenge to find time to consider our spiritual nature and practice the disciplines that nourish our souls and strengthen our beliefs. The recent developments in technology seem to have only increased the *'busy-ness'* of our lives and further distance us from the quiet time needed for prayer and contemplation. When I fractured my collarbone, I understood that the time I needed to recuperate would provide me with the leisure and solitude I had been craving, leaving me to conclude that my misfortune had been a blessing in disguise. What better time than Advent to find myself with unexpected free time to reflect on my faith and tend to my soul!

In response to His disciples' request that He teach them to pray, Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer. Brief as it is, the Lord's Prayer contains all of the essential elements required to draw us nearer to God and neighbor. The prayer begins with the simple statement of praise for our Maker, "*Our*

Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” It then petitions God to bring healing to a hurting world, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* I have reflected on this line a good amount of late and concluded that if God’s will is to be manifest here on earth, it will be through you and me. For God not only lives *in* us, He also lives *through* us. Our hands are His hands. Our words give voice to His thoughts and feelings, never more so than when our walk upon this earth follows the path He has laid out for us.

Advent is the time of year when we are meant to consider such things. Luke’s Gospel tells us that Jesus was born in a lowly Bethlehem manger as he was unwanted anywhere else. It was a humble beginning to be sure, but a prophetic one as well for much of Jesus’ adult life was spent in the company of the world’s forgotten and lost souls. His was a life that denied itself in every way so that others might be served and healed. Jesus’ ministry often took Him *on the road* at times leading Him to depend on the kindness of others to provide Him with shelter. And as it was at the time of His birth, there were nights when no one had room for Him, leaving Jesus and His disciples to fend for themselves.

At Advent, we His followers prepare to welcome Him into our lives and provide Him shelter in our hearts in the hope that His will for the heavenly transformation of this world might be manifest through us. I have been given ample time to consider such things of late, largely thanks to a fractured collarbone. For that I am especially grateful.

In Guatemala due to a high rate of illiteracy, there are many people who cannot perform the simple task of writing their name. In such cases a thumbprint is usually substituted for a signature. I have always included a Christmas card with the winter letter. The giving of cards is a tradition I have always loved. When I was a child, all the Christmas cards our family received were kept in a special stocking and hung in our living room. Each year I set aside a special time just before Christmas to carefully read every one. I considered sending this year’s winter letter without a card, as due to my injury, I cannot personally address and sign the cards as I usually do. But I ultimately did not want to forgo the cards and decided that I would sign them this year with my thumbprint. All things considered, it seems appropriate.

Thank you for seeing us through another year, our 16th. As many of you know it has been an especially difficult year. One of our youngsters was shot outside our carpentry shop and nearly died. Crime and violence continued to rise throughout 2010. The situation is particularly discouraging for young men coming of age in Guatemala at this time. Never more than now is our work necessary. As a result, our Strategic Planning Committee has been at work creating a plan to develop new services to better serve our youngsters. This will require additional funding. We appeal to you during this time of giving to help support our much-needed growth.

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah,

George
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