

**September 7, 2014 – 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Prepared by Br. Martin Shea, MM, Guatemala**

Ezekiel 33:7-9; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

*“Love your neighbor as yourself.” -- Romans 13:9*

In today’s reading Paul is having trouble with the Romans – just as he would have with us today – because people get caught up in what divides and separates them, in what causes war. We have to find what brings us together and Paul helps us find that which we seek. It is love that fulfills the law, and the same love fulfills our lives.

The gap of separation closes when Jesus dares to touch the sick. With his touch healing takes place. Saint Francis of Assisi had a similar experience when he was able to bend down and kiss a leper. Dorothy Day joined the people on the street and the Catholic Worker was born. The missionary becomes one with the people he lives with. There is no distinction, no division. Even the doctors we work with here in the Petén begin to become one with the people they serve. This is a struggle, because love is a struggle.

The struggle of love and peace-making in Guatemala continues after long years of a genocidal war that tore our poor country apart and ended in death and destruction as all wars do. War is no answer. Paul, to the Romans and to us in the modern world, calls us back to the one answer – love – that transcends time and people. We all have that much within us that can transform the world around us and within us. It can happen in our lives, it is happening in the lives of the Guatemalan people. As one young girl in our community put it, “No love, no peace.”

This is not a popular message. It was not popular in the time of Jesus and it is not popular in our time. But in a world of so much inhuman insanity of wars and violence, the message of Jesus and Paul is still the same and basic to our faith – that peace is possible. Not an easy message, but then no one ever said that to follow Jesus would be easy.

One parable as I try to bring this reflection to some conclusion: There is a home for the aged here in the Petén in this remote area of Guatemala, with some 65 men and women in the final years of their lives. I found myself going there regularly and just taking my place with them. In the beginning, it was very disconcerting, as there seemed to be separation between me and them, but over time the distance between us diminished. I now find myself to be one of them; we are all about the same age. Now that the distance between us has broken down their presence and love helps me along the way. It is quite a surprise to find mission in an old plastic chair in a home for the aged!

**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, social justice and integrity of creation**

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