



Peace Is the Work of All Our Hands and All Our Hearts

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“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom God’s favor rests.” NIV Luke 2:14

The arrival of Jesus is the desire of peace for our hearts and for the earth. It is the gift of heaven to the people waiting for a messiah. That is why Christmas is a season full of light.

These past two years have been different because of COVID. Christmas 2020 was uncertain, and thinking of gathering together with family or faith communities was not an option as a new surge of the virus was still affecting the United States. The constant fear of being infected with COVID-19 made our vision and hope difficult to access.

I, for instance, lost two dear cousins to COVID-19 during 2021, and in 2020, my aunt Maria—my second mother—also almost died when she got COVID, and her heart was giving out. For many people, including faith leaders, the pandemic has made it hard to find inspiration to continue working for justice.

I have been feeling depleted in my faith and my soul. I needed to find this new source of hope and I decided to take a group of ten people down to El Salvador this past November. El Salvador is my homeland and the place that gives me a sense of belonging; something that I often lacked as an immigrant in the United States. I left El Salvador at age fourteen and did what many Central American immigrants do: cross the US border illegally to survive. In our case, we were fleeing the civil war of the 1980s in El Salvador. My mother and aunt brought us to the US because they considered it safer. When we arrived, we began our new life in a place where we were cruelly discriminated against and laughed at for having heavy accents. I go to El Salvador every chance I get because it reminds me of who I am and what formed me. I feel proud to have had a cultural upbringing that shaped my social justice commitment.

When I go to El Salvador, I usually take people to see the history of faith leaders

who put their lives on the frontlines because they couldn't withstand the repression suffered by the poor. On this trip, we visited the crypt of San Oscar Romero. Archbishop Romero was a strong courageous voice during the 1980s. He asked the government to stop killing and disappearing people whose only crime was demanding a dignified life. Romero was murdered on March 24, 1980 while presiding over communion, and he became a martyr and sign of resistance for thousands. He once said in a homily: "If I die, I will resurrect in the people of El Salvador." And he did, and those of us who grew up listening to his message were impacted by his determination to not be silenced. During the trip we also visited the burial site of the six Jesuit priests that were brutally assassinated at the Catholic University of El Salvador in 1989. Their death brought international attention to the armed conflict in El Salvador, which helped propel the peace negotiations that culminated in the signing of the peace accords between the guerrillas and the government in 1992. Romero, the Jesuits, and the thousands of innocent civilians who died in the conflict are symbols of a faith that demands that we sacrifice comfort to stand up for our values. This is why visiting El Salvador always brings me new life and I know it did too for the pastors that were traveling with me. Witnessing the lives of the martyrs of El Salvador was one piece of our visit. We also visited rural areas and learned about important work to safeguard mangroves, the habitat of turtles and water. We were inspired by the work of local communities doing whatever it takes to save their towns and the planet. We also heard of groups advocating for the human rights of the LGBTQI community in El Salvador. We witnessed and blessed the affirmation of a trans man at a special service held by Comunidad Magdala, an open and affirming congregation in a country where hate crimes go unpunished.

This trip gave me the needed spiritual fuel to continue fighting in my corner of the world. I pray we keep finding ways to restore the holy vision of a world built by people who believe in peace.

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