

Epiphany 2007

Each year starts with the story of the journey of three wise men in search of the Savior. My year began again with a journey to El Salvador (the Savior) to visit our friends in the live mountain settlements. It is always a journey of epiphanies and encounters With wise men and women.

Let me tell you of Samuél Guzman, one of our special friends, who has been loved and respected by our delegations. For several years, he had been assigned by CEBES as our guide through the five settlements. He was a strong leader, a good companion and a wonderful storyteller.

Samuél had been a young catechist in the early 1980s when the war came to these mountains. When his father, a community leader, was taken and killed by the death squads, Samuél joined the FMLN, the people's army, that resisted the military forces at war with the Salvadoran people. He became a leader with the *compas* (short for *compañeros*) in the very area where our settlements are located. As a result, he knows every footpath the *compas* used and every ravine where they lived during the ten years they defended their people.

He told us many stories about the struggle of his people against the US-backed Salvadoran forces that bombed and massacred the people of these mountains. He has been an excellent spokesman for and example of Archbishop Romero's spirit that so enlivened the Salvadoran poor and has given them hope.

His stories tell of the hardships and courage of these mountain campesinos. They also speak of their faith. His people believed that *El Salvador (the Savior)* accompanied them in their way of the cross.

For the past few years, Samuél has suffering from the effects of a serious stroke. He is grateful that our delegations have been stopping at his home to visit him. On this visit, it was obvious that he was dying. He was in a wheel chair, very thin and could barely move his arms or hands and could speak only a few words. He wept when he saw us. We all wept at the sight of our dear friend in broken health.

I was moved by his final words to me. "Padrecito," he said, "siempre joven." "Dear father, you are always young." I have been able to manage the sometimes challenging mountain trails, but I think that this is not what Samuél was speaking of. It was rather the energy and strength of spirit that I have always found in him. I choose to believe that he was giving some of his spirit over to me - a most generous bequest.

To listen to the stories of our Salvadoran friends is to honor them. By accompanying them, we have become a small part of their stories and they have entered into ours as well. We honor our beloved Samuél, truly a wise man, who has provided us with many epiphanies.

Peace,
Father Tom

