

All Souls' Day Remembrance

November is the month for us to pray especially for our loved ones who have died. You are invited to list the names of your departed family and friends on the enclosed slip and send it in to be placed on the altar at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco.

St. Martin de Porres Feast Day Triduum

In honor of our patron, St. Martin de Porres, whose feast day is November 3, Masses will be offered at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco on November 1, 2, and 3. We invite you to mark the enclosed list of petitions and send it in. Please join us each day in praying the Triduum (back page).

On Death

I always ask myself what I could report to you that would portray a clearer picture of what it is like to be working in a place like Rabinal, Guatemala, but in the end I just let the Spirit guide me and hope it is close to the mark.

As I hear the bells of the church tolling for a funeral Mass that I will soon celebrate, I decide that my theme will be how death is celebrated here. Perhaps you are disappointed with this theme, but let me remind you that for us Catholic Christians, it is the same theme as Resurrection. **And the way of celebrating death here is the most transcendent value of Mayan Christian faith and the most deeply rooted custom in this culture.**

I often celebrate Mass in a chapel called *Calvario*, a colonial building at the cemetery with massive adobe walls at least 400 years old, severely damaged by numerous earthquakes but still standing. We have Mass there every Monday, but each month the first Monday's Mass is called *Responso*, during which we read names of the dead.



*Father Timothy Conlan, O.P.,
our missionary in
Rabinal, Guatemala.*

We have stacks of books listing each family's deceased members. In years past all the names were read, which took up to five hours, but now we read just the lists made for that day, while blessing the 100 or so books listing all the others.

When you enter the chapel for the *Responso*, you see a sea of little arrangements, each made up of several tall tapered candles surrounded by greens and flowers. Families bring in their own displays, and they cover the floor in every aisle and all around the altar. It is like walking into a small garden, with maybe 500 candles burning and the prayer men waving their incensors. In this monthly display, those left behind are sharing with their dearly departed this moment of



Family members honoring their departed loved ones inside Calvario during Responso.

life here on earth, seen in the hope of the greens and flowers; as well as their faith in life after death, seen in the light of the candles. During this Mass of personal contact and prayer, we recall the dead, speak their names, talk to them, hear their voices and see their faces once again, since, through faith, the dead are still with us.

The Achi Mayans here in Rabinal have been devout Catholics for 450 years, freely inspired by the doctrine of the Dominican Friars under Bartholomew de Las Casas. But they never lost their deep ties to the values of their ancestral religion in which the dead remain in contact with, and continue to influence, those on earth. They firmly believe that the dead cannot rest until justice has been served. Families must pay back all debts of their dead, and if someone owes money or atonement to someone who has

died, he may receive signs or messages of discontent from the dead until balance is realigned through making restitution or asking pardon.

Further, all due honor must be shown to the dead, or they will not be able to intercede for their family. In massacres during the early 1980's in Rabinal, almost 5,000 innocent victims, including babies, children, and the elderly, were brutally tortured, raped, and murdered, and many were then buried in secret graves without the customary funeral rites. Until they are reburied properly-- which includes such rites as setting the table with the dead one's favorite food and sending him off with his clothes and cherished personal effects in the casket--their families cannot rest, and the victims themselves can never be at peace or received into the state of the elders in which they can become guides for their people.

Prayers for the dead must be continuously renewed in order to maintain peace. Besides the funeral Mass and a novena, they are honored with special Masses at the first, seventh and fourteenth anniversaries of their deaths. Everyone must come and the family must provide food in exchange for the guests' time in prayer. In between, families often hire a prayer man to go to the cemetery or *Calvario* to say prayers, renewing the union between them and their departed. **This way of thinking permeates the life of the Mayans here and certainly dominates the rituals of the Church.**



Procession to rebury massacre victims with proper rites.



Little house of leaves constructed over a loved one's tomb during an All Souls' Day celebration.

Ancestors are consulted in every celebration, but the greatest of the feast days is All Souls' Day. The day before, on All Saints' Day, families gather at the cemetery to weed and decorate the tombstones, and then at midnight the celebration begins. They set out each of their departed's favorite food, leaving it uncovered so they can enjoy the aromas; they pray and

talk to the dead, asking for favors; they play music, eat, and imbibe in the local "fire water," celebrating as a family in unison with the dead.

These customs may be seen as unchristian by those of us living in a westernized culture of technology, science and abstract thought. However, the doctrine we practice, while not as

tangible, is essentially the same. Most of us, as Catholics, do believe that those who die with unrepented sins are in Purgatory awaiting purification, and that our prayers for the Lord's intercession can assist them. And we believe that those who have died with faith in Christ live with Him and are able to intercede for us.

Offerings of candlelight and the loved one's favorite foods on All Souls' Day.



St. Martin de Porres Triduum

My professor of theology used to say that the way people care for the dead is a measure of the values they hold for their fellow man. But I say it is more: **It is faith that in the end we will all be one with the Lord of Glory.** So enjoy the Risen Life.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Tim



Icon
by
Fr. Kieran
Healy, O.P.



Inside Calvario ablaze with candles.

If you would like to remember our missionary work in your will, our legal title is:



**Province of the Holy Name, Inc.
Dominican Mission Foundation
2506 Pine Street
P.O. Box 15367
San Francisco, CA 94115-0367**

We are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

First Day: *St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.*

(Mention your petitions, followed by the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Closing Prayer: *Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.*

Second Day: *St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to commend us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)

Third Day: *Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.*

(Your petitions, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Closing Prayer.)