

The Power Of Prayer, The Gift Of Life

Have you ever given thought to the parable of the mustard seed? Our Lord gifted us with many lessons, some easier to understand than others. What did He mean by the kingdom of God being like a tiny mustard seed, which grows into a tremendous bush with extensive branches? Maybe an insight is right under our noses.

Drs. David Brody, DDS, and Joanne Liegner, OBGYN, a husband and wife team from nearby Newton, NJ, were among the first supporters of the Development Office of the Salesian Sisters. Their two children had been enrolled in nursery school at Camp Auxilium in the 1980's, where they became friends with its director, Sr. Mary Rinaldi. When they learned of their friend's challenge to begin a Development Office to raise funds for the retirement needs of elderly Sisters, they responded, as early as 1991.

Skip ahead a decade, to another Salesian nun, Sr. Ernestina Yieyra, who works in Chiapas, Mexico. The people she serves are among the poorest of the poor. Sr. Ernestina had been an exchange student at Mary Help of Christians Academy. Determined to help the poor of Chiapas, she returned to North Haledon in 2000 and approached the Sisters for advice. Both Sr. Mary and Sr. Lou Ann Fantauzza directed her to the Salesian Missions office in New Rochelle, NY. Sr. Ernestina had hoped to be directed to a generous American benefactor, but was resigned to the advice she received, and asked for special prayers.

Apparently, when we ask for the right thing in prayer, God sometimes answers us almost immediately. The very next day, Sr. Lou Ann was approached by Drs. Brody and Liegner, who expressed a desire to give of themselves to the works and needs of the Salesians beyond the U.S. Sr. Lou Ann could not

help but think of Sr. Ernestina. What resulted has been a mission of mercy each six months, whereby the doctors travel to Chiapas and provide medical attention to the impoverished. The need was so great that Dr. Brody recalls pulling over 100 teeth during his first two weeks, working from a makeshift hut. As time has progressed, other doctors have joined in this mission of charity. A story in *Partners in Giving* spurred some of our high school-aged youth to volunteer.

Not all of the needy of Chiapas are able to visit the medical hut. For those too infirm to travel, the doctors make "house calls," to impoverished huts, over difficult terrain. In one such hut lived a namesake of Sr. Ernestina, an 8-year-old boy named Ernesto, with badly malformed legs, one actually twisted beneath him. Ernesto's condition left him unable to walk, and throughout his young life he resorted to propelling himself around on elbows and knees. His was a desperate case, and doctors in Mexico recommended amputation.

Our own doctors took great compassion on Ernesto, and gave his case special attention. After consulting with specialists at the Shriner's Hospital of Philadelphia, it was determined that Ernesto's legs could be corrected through surgery. The Shriner's Hospital is a charitable institution, and the treatment was proposed at no cost. The trick was to get Ernesto to America.

This was no small task, particularly as visas became a difficult proposition

after 9/11. Eventually, the visa was obtained last summer and a date set for the surgery. Sr. Ernestina blanketed the Salesian Province with e-mails enlisting fervent prayers. Many Sisters rejoiced

on receiving the prayer petition, which was e-mailed the morning of the surgery. The date was December 12, positively the only date the hospital could manage – the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas, and special guardian of Mexico!

The surgery was a complete success. Rehabilitation will take two years, during which time Ernesto is

enrolled at school in Newton, and living with Drs. Brody and Liegner. They will bring him home for brief visits every six months. In the meantime, he is adjusting quickly to life in the U.S. A boy whose family hut had no electricity or running water now has an unheard-of room of his own, a TV, and loves wearing Spiderman outfits!

So, dear reader, consider the mustard seed. Who could have imagined from the humble beginnings of the Development Office would come a miracle such as this? Branches of charity with no limit to their growth. The kingdom of God, indeed.

Volunteers are needed to assist the Salesian Sisters in helping the poor in Mexico. Cataract surgeons, physicians, dentists, nurses, EMTs, med students, etc. willing to serve for one week in March or August should visit www.chiapasproject.org or call Dr. Joanne Liegner: (973) 383-4500.



Thanks to you, Ernesto will walk!