

Mothers Day Mass at Tomás and Juanita's Home - Trinity Sunday

Jayden went to the table and brought back some bread. He broke a piece off, smiled and then handed it to me. Next he went to Tomás, the father of Zury and grandfather of Naomi who were killed in October when Eduardo, Zury's boyfriend, drove his car into the living room where she was standing with her three month old baby in her arms. Jayden, her other son, fell through a crack in the wall. Tomás was also very nearby. Death gave no time to act.

Jayden took a piece of bread and gave it to Tomás, his grandfather, who will now raise him. Jayden then went to Chuy, the father of Eduardo, who quickly broke the bread and ate it. He then went to Bertha, Eduardo's mother. She didn't say anything, the tears wetting her dress said everything. She knew that Jayden was blessed by God. She knew that, when her son crashed into the room, the wall where his mother and sister were killed was cracked open, and by the grace of God, Jayden fell through the crack. She knew that Jayden did not make the connection with her being the mother of the person who killed his mother. She accepted the bread. Jayden continued to go around the entire circle breaking bread. Three days earlier we were at a retreat for healing for those who have lost loved ones and relatives and friends who have lost loved ones or whose sons or daughters have been dealt a LWOP sentence to die in prison. There was shared pain around this room. Before the retreat began, I asked Tomas and Juanita how they were. They said they were alright but deeply worried about Eduardo's parents, Chuy and Bertha, who still couldn't believe what their son had done. I suggested we meet at their house and have a simple breaking of bread on Mother's Day. Juanita liked the idea for it would be a great moment to give them the small paschal candle she had held in her hands and had blessed at the Easter sunrise liturgy.

Now, a few days later we were gathered in a circle listening to the word of God, words of hope and forgiveness from the one who could bring life out of death. The healing oil was on the table where the bread would be blessed and broken. We closed our eyes and listened to an Ignatian meditation of Jesus appearing to his mother after his resurrection. We entered a scene where Jesus with glorified wounds stands next to his mother offering to heal our own wounds - the deep relationship between a mother and son.

After the meditation, Esperanza, who has recently lost her nephew to violence went to each person gathered in the circle and gently formed a cross on the palm of the hands with some oil. Then each person wrote a letter to their mother, either living or dead, telling her what has been the hardest thing for them since last Mothers Day.

I think losing my daughter and granddaughter but in this difficult time, I have also had the opportunity to get to know true forgiveness and the hope of reuniting with my daughter and granddaughter once again. I learned to see the pain in others' hearts and not only in mine. Live life with hope and enjoy all your loved ones, appreciate everything God gives you, and look at death as a step of getting closer to him.

-Tomás

Mother of mine, tragedy came to our home. I don't know why my beloved son may have tried to commit suicide, when it was actually the complete opposite. He ran over his girlfriend whom he loved so much, and his daughter, his first daughter. Since that day, I can't find peace in my heart. Mother, you who cared for him so much, take care of my son and give him

spiritual healing. Take care of the Bonilla family. They are good people. Amen.
-Jesus (Chuy)

When we were done writing, the candle was passed around as each person read what they had written. I began to realize the powerful mystery of God. How many times have we heard how God is a community of three persons, sharing life. This communal flow of God, the Trinity, was bringing all of us into the uncharted waters of our human experience.

Now it was time to break the bread; to share the body of Christ. Jayden had come into the circle after the healing and was sitting in Tomás's lap. His eyes fixed on the bread being broken, just as he had done earlier.

How many memories and emotions were flowing around the circle? But the forgiveness coming from the heart of the one who forgave those who tortured him like an animal on the cross was more powerful than the anger or the need for revenge: God is love - a community of self-giving, forgiving love.

Before the closing prayer, I asked if anyone would like to share. Rita, who works with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the healing ministry of those affected by crime, spoke of how moved she was by Juanita and Tomás's journey that has brought them to forgive, but even more by their ability to reach out to Eduardo's parents. At this moment, Juanita's handed Bertha the small paschal candle. The pain contained in this flowing of mystery of God was evident as she handed this lighted candle to Bertha.

Tomás then said that we have lost two of our loved ones. We do not want you to lose your son to the system forever. We pray he will continue to find peace from receiving our forgiveness, God's forgiveness. We are sad that the D.A. cannot understand how we can forgive. Perhaps all she has everyexperienced has been revenge in the families of victims. I want to see my daughter and granddaughter again, but if I wallow in hate and revenge this will not happen." Again the flowing of the deep mystery of God was present around the circle; deeper, stronger, more powerful than hate and violence.

As we joined hands for the final prayer, the flowing of God's spirit was so palpable that everyone knew something bigger than what meets the eyes had happened. After this experience; after seeing what forgiveness really feels like, no one would be the same. We concluded by praying for Zury and Naomi, and also for Eduardo going to court next week.

Amen.