



December 25, 2016

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone—Isaiah 9:1*

Dear Friends;

Christ is born!

For nearly sixty years an armed conflict has raged in Columbia between the Columbian government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia). The conflict has taken hundreds of thousands of lives since 1958. The FARC hid deep in the jungle from where they planned and executed their attacks. So how do you try and convince armed rebels to demobilize? One Columbian advertising executive had an idea—launch an advertising campaign.

José Sokoloff is passionate about making peace. He said, “I try to get them out of the jungle. Columbia has been at war for over 50 years, has caused 5.7 million people to be displaced—the second largest displacement in the world—and cost us 220,000 lives. And there’s also fear, kidnappings, terrorism—the collateral damage of war.” He said, “It’s about freedom, by talking to lots of guerillas we reached the conclusion that guided our campaign—they are as much prisoners of their organizations as the hostages. It is a life commitment—you never get out of it. Once you’re in, all your dreams are circumscribed to the organization. We wanted to remind them of the power of feeling.”

His firm worked with the army, government and civilian organizations to end the terrorism. They came up with a campaign to reach out to the guerillas. Deep in the jungle nine trees measuring 75 feet tall were decorated with 2,000 LED Christmas lights and a banner that said, “If Christmas can come to the jungle, you can come home. Demobilize!” The lights were rigged with a mechanism that whenever the guerillas passed by the trees would light up. The campaign convinced about 5 percent of the guerillas to give up arms.

In another campaign glowing plastic balls full of gifts and 6,323 messages from guerilla family members were floated down a river trafficked by the revolutionaries. This led to even more guerillas demobilizing. 18,000 guerillas had demobilized—such a drop that the guerilla leaders were forced to the bargaining table. The fall in numbers was not solely due to Sokoloff’s work, but it proved to be a powerful message to those trapped in a cycle of violence. Sokoloff says, “We need to remember that soldiers and guerillas are not different. We are the same people.” Recently, a peace treaty has been signed and now Columbia looks to a brighter future.

We live in a dark time war, terrorism, and insurrections are scattered throughout the globe. Racism, religious intolerance and genocide are on the upswing. Pope Francis has described this as a piecemeal world war. It is not true that violence, war, hatred, death and destruction have come to stay. We do not have to believe that violence is the only answer to violence. The Prophet Isaiah dares to dream of a world without violence and war, “*For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames.*” Today we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Jesus reveals to us the vulnerability of God’s love. In Jesus, God gives us the image of God’s power—a tiny helpless baby and a man nailed to a cross. Jesus has come to show us that we can meet the darkness with patience, understanding and love. These must be our tools. The only way we can do this is to become vulnerable to his love for us. Only then we can boldly meet the darkness of this world with the light of mercy and love. We can dare, like Isaiah, to dream dreams of peace. It is not true that our dreams of liberation and the dignity of all humans (regardless of their religion, culture, nation or language) are not meant for this earth. We can then do unimaginable things like greet revolutionaries with Christmas lights in the jungle or float on a river glowing globes filled with messages of love and know that under all our differences we are the same children of God. *Peace to all upon whom God’s favor rests!*

Peace,

Fr. Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.stannechurchbyron.com