

# La Despedida

— *brother Daniel*

IN THE EVENING OF OUR LAST DAY AT OUR Benedictine Sisters' motherhouse while we are in Mexico, we always end with a festive *despedida*—Spanish for farewell. Having shared a delicious meal, we opened into a large circle to enable an inclusive family type conversation. When the little plates with ice cream and just-made cookies came to our circle we knew it was time to say good-bye.

The sisters, however, asked us not to leave the dining room quite yet. They pushed in a lectern covered in white linen with small photos cascading gracefully over the folded cloth. We recognized the faces as the murdered students from the Teachers' School in Ayotzinapa. The absence of these young people had become the emotional focus of the whole country. They were a powerful symbol of all those who have recently disappeared under the government's watch.

Some of the sisters then pulled out white ribbons from the top of this lectern. Soft background music began to play and the sisters gracefully danced around the pictures. A couple of the older sisters were holding the ribbon with one hand and a cane with the other as they slowly moved with the music. We brothers sat silently and respectfully during this intimate time of mourning, honoring the disappeared. The sacredness of the moment permeated the whole dining room.

Our attentive eyes followed the sisters' motions, aware that they were immersed in prayer. Mindful that the native peoples of Mexico have long addressed the "Holy" through dance, we were moved by the reverence with which the sisters' gestures pleaded for their suffering people, crying out for justice.

Now, as I reflect on this poignant gift during our *despedida*, the beautiful words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel shed light on its meaning: "The acceptance of the spirit is prayer—prayer as a way of insight, not as a way of speaking ... And the spirit of God is present whenever we are willing to accept it."

The sisters' prayer swayed from those ribbons and merged sorrow and hope together, interlacing a path of the spirit. We brothers often sing this challenge during our liturgy at home: "God has woven eternity into time, teaching us to weave a web of peace and joy!"<sup>1</sup> ■



<sup>1</sup> from the song, "Eternity into Time" - © 2015, The Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.