



Suesa nuns, Weston brothers and a gathering of friends.

As at a Banquet!

- *brother Peter*

THERE IS AN AMBIENCE OF CONVIVIALITY AT A BANQUET among friends and companions. There is an ambience of stressed confrontation at a debate where only one wins and all others lose. In the church, Francis, our new Bishop of Rome, is clearly embodying the spirit of banquet. Not that disagreement and dissent never occur among friends and companions at a banquet, but assuredly and determinedly in the context of continued friendship and fellowship. With Pope Francis we are learning again what it means to be a church where acceptance, inclusion and mercy create the foundational climate for genuine communication and communion.

On our recent visit in September with our sisters, the Trinitarian Nuns of Suesa, Cantabria, Spain, we were given a booklet of an interview with Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop emeritus of the Prelature of São Félix do Araguaia, Mato Grosso, Brasil. In it Bishop Pedro speaks about Base Christian Communities as model and form of being church:

The great challenge for today is *convivencia* (convivial fellowship) in every area of life: in the family, in the neighborhood, at work, in church communities . . . *Convivencia* presupposes that as a church we assume an attitude of equality: relating as equals with other churches, with other religions, with other spiritualities, and with the whole human family. Our starting point must be this macro-ecumenical posture, not one turned in on itself. We must begin with a vision that is open and in communion with all other movements, spiritualities

and religions. We must present our faith not as superior to all, but rather as contributing the particular experience and story of Jesus of Nazareth to all.¹

Our visit and interchange with our Suesa sisters was just such an experience of *convivencia*. Our communities are from particular monastic traditions, Trinitarian and Benedictine. We are embedded in American culture and history, they in European and Spanish. Yet we relate as equals, men and women. We experienced the joy and benefit of sharing mutually our distinct and challenging experiences of monastic prayer, work and community life. We were with them as at a banquet.

Thankfully, we have had many graced-filled experiences of being church. Within our community we have been nurtured by years of consensual living together as brothers in the Benedictine tradition. Our now 38 year association with our Mexican Benedictine sisters has been a gift of mutual support, challenge and on-going learning together. With the sisters, we have witnessed and participated in the proverbially exuberant fellowship of poor and simple people in Base Christian Communities in Mexico. Brother Simón Pedro Arnold, from the Benedictine monastery in Chucuito, Peru, recently spent a 6 month sabbatical with us. In our last bulletin, he wrote about his experience of interculturality with the Aymara culture and religion of Peru, an example of how religions can fruitfully relate in mutual acceptance. He was with us for the intercommunity encounter in Cuernavaca, Mexico, last February, also described in our last bulletin. Pope Francis and Pedro Casaldáliga have given us words to describe what we have been living in these and many other interactions. With this clear articulation, we are also challenged to a more conscious and profound practice of *convivencia*.

The Trinitarian sisters shared with us something of the rich cultural, historical, and ecological riches of their area – the beautiful seashore at Somo on the Atlantic coast of Cantabria, the traditional procession of sea craft – fishing boats and otherwise – before the “Virgin of the Port” at Santoña; a day spent at a nearby hostel for pilgrims on the “Camino de Santiago” with Ernesto, a priest friend; a visit to a nearby 12th century Romanesque church at Bareyo; and a visit to the site of the Paleolithic drawings at Altamira and it’s wonderful museum. The lay community from Madrid who has befriended the sisters came to spend a weekend with us and the sisters. We renewed contact with Luis Arancibia and his wife, Teresa Casillas, who were among them and had visited us in Weston in June of 2012.

But what most enlivened all of these encounters was the daily community ambience of prayer, exchange, and interaction with our Trinitarian sisters which gave meaning and specialness to our visit. That is the grounding of our ongoing search together for monastic authenticity, peace, and joy. That is both the source and the fruit of the *convivencia* which we share. ■

¹ Pedro Casaldáliga, *utopía encarnada*, by Avelino Seco Muñoz, © 2013, Editorial Nueva Utopía, Madrid, pg. 38-39 (*my translation*)