

As Thanksgiving nears every year and I begin to be more in tune with gratefulness (I should be this “in tune” year round), I always think back to the time period that changed my life forever – those years of missionary work.

At a time when selfishness, arrogance, and taking things for granted defined my young adulthood, the experiences I had in those third-world communities during that phase of my life gave me first-hand insight into the real meaning of humility and gratitude.

From nerve-wracking trips up mountains through rugged and dangerous terrain, to shoveling dirt during construction of schools and aqueducts, to painting churches, to washing clothes in rivers, to tending to villagers’ open cuts, scrapes, and tooth aches, to distributing countless boxes of donated clothing and medicine, to sleeping on floors, to using latrines (have you ever used a latrine in the dark of night on the edge of a mountain in the middle of nowhere? It’s like being in your own horror movie). All of them experiences which shook me to my core and made me realize how fortunate I was; am.

My parents, from very early on, made sure to show me and tell me how this was so. But some of us need more than show ‘n tell.I needed a life lesson in living color.

When I think back to those days I remember, more so than what shook me to my core, who rocked my world: The individuals I met over there.

The demeanor these people exhibited day in day out in the face of adversity made an incredible and long lasting impression on me – how they helped our group help them; how they offered us the little they had to make us comfortable; how they prayed with such devotion – all the while with a spirit of contentment. In my eyes they had nothing and lacked everything, yet their living conditions were heartbreaking only to me. Because the existence of nothing and everything, as it turns out, is in the heart of the beholder – they were rich where it counts and they knew it…..and we felt it.

Once upon a time I set out to help some people who, in turn, helped me. Today, whenever I catch myself in fleeting moments of that princess-like behavior, mostly as I take something for granted, I think about the sights, sounds, and smells of the villages I lived in during those summers. And thanks to the infinite wisdom of our merciful God, who sent me there because He knew I was in much need of a few great lessons (lest I forget those courtesy of my sister's illness and death), there are enough of these incredible images engraved inside me to slap the foolish out of me and remind me of what counts.

Once upon a time I was a princess. I left a pampered city girl and returned dethroned carrying the sights, sounds, and smells of…….. humility, faith and love. This is the stuff that keeps one real.

I have so many reasons for which to be thankful. So many. Mostly, I thank God for the individuals He has chosen for me throughout my life (some of whom I miss terribly), and the lessons they brought along with them.

Wishing all of you a wonderful journey of awareness leading up to Thanksgiving.

Much love. God bless.

"Thanksgiving is possible only for those who
take time to remember; no one can give thanks
who has a short memory."

~ Unknown

Your love, Jesus, is an ocean
with no shore to bound it.
And if I plunge into it, I carry
with me all the possessions
I have. You know, Lord,
what these possessions are—
the souls you have seen
fit to link with mine.

~ *St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

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