



## May 2, 2010 The Fifth Sunday of Easter

*“I give you a new commandment: Love on another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other.” John 13:34*

Dear Friends;

Recently in Starbuck’s I saw a CD that caught my attention. The cover was black in the center was a cross with the Virgin of Guadalupe holding a dead soldier that in contrast to her looked very Gringo—he had blond hair and fair color. The CD was called *San Patricio* by the Chieftains.

I knew that the Chieftains were a traditional Irish music group. However what makes this CD unique is that it also contained traditional Mexican music mixed in with the traditional Irish sounds. The introduction explained that the CD celebrates an event in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) that is little known in the USA but remembered by generations of Mexicans.

19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland was ruled by Great Britain. There was a great famine—a blight that affected the main Irish staple, the potato. While wheat was plenty it was grown by the Irish overlords and sent to England, while millions of Irish starved. Many Irish began to immigrate to America.

Here they found that they were not welcomed because of their race and religion. Pressed into service because of poverty many found their way into the military. When war broke out between the USA and Mexico Captain John Riley and a small battalion of soldiers abandoned their posts and the USA to fight with the Mexican army under the command of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana. They formed the Battalion of St. Patrick—in Spanish *San Patricio*—the patron saint of Ireland.

Mistreated, unwelcome and maligned as untrustworthy, it is not hard to imagine their motivations. They found themselves under officers who had the same English and Protestant leanings as those who had oppressed them in Ireland. Now they were asked to fight in war for reasons few understood. It may have seemed as an act of aggression against a Catholic country, in order to take more territory.

They fought bravely alongside their Mexican compatriots until they were defeated with the Mexican army at the fort of Churubusco. The *San Patricios* refused to surrender and it was only after there was no more ammunition that the remaining members were captured by the American army. They were then separated from the Mexican regulars. They were court-martialed for treason and hung. A select few were branded on both cheeks with a “D” for “deserter” and left to their fate.

The richness of the music of this CD speaks of the richness that happens whenever cultures come in contact with each other and both are enriched. It also speaks of the bonds of communion which we share with others in faith—they cross language and culture. The story also speaks of the sadness and sorrow created by cultural chauvinism, racism and religious hatred. These are things which are still with us and are in need of conversion to the radical love to which Christ calls all humanity.

This Sunday we celebrate Cinco de Mayo with our sisters and brothers of the Spanish speaking community. Cinco de Mayo celebrates a victory of the Mexican army over the invading and better equipped French army. This is a day for our communities to come together and celebrate our rich heritages.

We need to reflect on the complex history of immigration to the new world. It is not quite as simple as some radical groups would have it appear. As Catholics we should have a unique sensitivity to the issue for three reasons. First as Catholics we were not at first welcomed to the USA we should not forget that. Secondly, the Body of Christ is called to embrace all peoples. Thirdly and most importantly the commandment to love does not exclude based on race or creed.

We need to bring our unique perspective to the questions of migration and immigration. Working together we can solve the complex issues of immigration that face the USA, Mexico and beyond. Feliz Cinco de Mayo!

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*