



# Eyes Fixed on Christ. He Will Lead the Way.

Dear Friends,

It's wonderful to be back with you...just great. Two weeks ago, I was in Bogotá, Columbia. My first trip to South America. So I'm out there early on a Sunday – off Bocaya Avenue – having my juice, coffee, planning to go to 9am Mass. There's a Catholic Church on every other block. I walk into the Church for 9am Mass, and there's not a seat to be had – but they're used to this; in fact, they bring in chairs and stools to place along the walls and center aisles. The priest enters through the side door because there's no room in the center aisle. A man makes his way down the aisle, tugging along his elderly dad. No one stares at this man, no dirty looks, because when a senior comes into church, a young person hops up to say, *"he can have my seat."*

As you celebrate Mass, not a sound to be heard. It's crowded inside and out; out the front door, people are standing and sitting – and not a sound outside. We are all crammed into the church to celebrate Mass together. Mass ends, and I go to the local café for a croissant. But I decide to go back to the 10:30am Mass -just to see what's cooking. Same thing! People packed in everywhere. After Mass, I go out to the Park for lunch. And then I go back to check out the 7:30pm Mass. Can

you believe - it was *even bigger* than the morning Masses.

The one thing the people haven't lost is God. God is the center of their lives. On Holy Days of Obligation, everything closes down – government buildings close. People are rushing and walking outside, but as they walk by the church, they make the sign of the cross.

I was traveling with priests and lay people and got a great sense of the culture and faith: 15,000 years of history. Man I got a sense of faith. One day when I con-celebrated Mass, the pastor announced my presence at the end – they had never had a Monsignor in their church: *"Monsignor wanted to be here to celebrate Mass, even though he doesn't speak a word of Spanish."* All the people applauded. Little did they know Msgr. is a nothing ;)

## **Not What We Say...it's What We Do...**

At the end of every Mass, in this poor, drug-ridden neighborhood, with police working to eradicate drugs for the sake of kids, the people applaud to thank the priest. The pastor is 32 years old. I watched an elderly lady go up to him after Mass. I asked the priest, *"Did she tell you she had nothing to eat?"* Yes, I'm told. *"And did you hear what she asked me? She just asked me for a piece of fruit to bring home."* The faith of the people...just extraordinary.

A lot of us have a lot to say.

Often we say, "We believe in God..." But it's not what we say that defines us, but rather how we live our daily lives. The people of Bogotá practice their faith to the best of their ability. We need to reflect: Does my faith in church match my actions? God knows there are lots of things in this universe that are ugly, that we have to deal with. But as I was told on my trip: *"Do not worry, Msgr. Keep your eyes fixed on Christ, and He will lead the way. That's what you need to do."*

## **I Went to Confession...**

I was traveling through the countryside and came upon a Benedictine Abbey. I wanted to go to Confession - hoping the priest didn't speak English...well, wouldn't you know! The Prior, who had been a priest for 51 years, said, *"I understand, I understand! Come, my son..."* Ay, ay, ay, I thought!

My mother loved the Our Father. Whenever there was a crisis or health issues, she would always pray the Our Father. So at the end of my Confession, the old Prior, with his gentle, loving way, said to me, *"Take the Our Father...take one, two, three words every day and meditate on those words...on how God works in our lives."* So I say to you folks: Life is good. I'm glad to be back with you. Meditate on the Our Father. Pray our words match our actions as we begin a new week.

## **God love you....**

Msgr. Walter