



GODWALK 2004 DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Following is a reflection offered by myself as director of the God Walk 2004 going through each day and offering specific reflections on aspects of the experience that stand out in my mind and heart. Were I to tell all, this reflection would be volumes, but I will try to be as brief as possible. Following the daily accounts is a closing reflection drawing it all together into the mission and ministry we are all a part of:

DAY ONE – Aug 8th

Day one started out great with everyone arriving at Mission Santa Cruz/Holy Cross Church in plenty of time to prepare for the journey ahead. After making sure all of the support vehicles were packed we filed into the little Mission Santa Cruz. There we sang worship songs and began with opening prayer. Then I gave the God Walk opening talk which touched on the following themes of: Being created in God's Image, the woundedness and disorder of the human family, Christ as God's response to the loss of dignity humanity had afforded itself (a liberating and restorative mission of God's Son), our mission as the body of Christ and God's new little word's made flesh -- reflecting the image and dignity of Christ in our world; and tying it all together I related the God Walk to be an opportunity to dive deeply into this mission we are called to and the love we are empowered to share.

We went from there to the Church of Holy Cross to participate in their 11:00 am Sunday Liturgy, and to receive a blessing from the Celebrant as well as the community for our journey. We received the "Blessing of Missionary Pilgrims" which I adapted from the two blessings of "Missionaries Sent to Proclaim the Gospel" and that of "Pilgrims," Both found in the NCCB book of blessings. In the Liturgy we participated in the procession, were introduced to the community and then after the homely were given a formal blessing after which the celebrant blessed our Pilgrim Cross and presented it to us. The cross is a large, approximately five and a half feet tall wooden cross that we carried the entire journey out of devotion, and out of solidarity with those who we serve, serve with, and those who carry heavy burdens in this world. Then again at the end of the liturgy we were given another blessing after which we processed out, with the celebrant and ministers, to take part in our great commission! It was a great and graceful liturgy and truly an empowering experience for our young church!

We then split into two groups as we had two service projects to accomplish that day! My group went to Golden Age Nursing Home in Capitola, where we had visited last year, to offer our humor (good or otherwise) and song to the residents there at Golden Age. The other group, headed by Edwin Chiu, went to New Life Rehab Center to do some humble janitorial service work for them.

We had a great time at Golden Age and some who had arrived early with the support drivers were already doing karaoke with the residents when the rest of us arrived! The highlight of this experience was the smiles of some particular people, especially as we

asked them to sign our Pilgrim Cross. One of the most spunky woman I've ever met just cracked me up, as every word she said would be repeated, and eventually turn into the total lyrics of a new song she was in the process of writing, to the tune of "frere jacques." Here favorite word was "Absolutely!!!" which she said at any opportunity, be it relevant or completely random, and then would repeat it in the same manner described above! These people, with so little of their own, showed to us the presence of Christ in their joy, receptivity as well as the challenging voice of their loneliness which our fast pace society has afforded them.

DAY TWO –Aug 9th

Monday was our Beach Clean up day! Being that there is little civilization between Aptos (where we had spent that night at Resurrection Church) and Watsonville, this made for a perfect service project as almost the entire coast line there is state beach and tremendously beautiful. Needless to say the theme of the day was focusing on being stewards of God's Creation. We focused on the understanding that being stewards is a necessary aspect of Christian Faith and Justice, and a demand of Gospel Living. We also contemplated the catholic tradition, rooted in the incarnation, of the sacramentality of all creation, which makes it our forum for communicating with the divine, thus making it intrinsically sacred and worthy of preservation.

We met the coast at Sea Scape State Beach where we started our walk and clean up work. Already it was looking to be a great day as the weather was perfect. The God Walk team fanned out across the shore and combed it clean of all waist, gathering it all into bags. The coast was spotless behind us. We also then started asking people on the beach to sign our cross as a symbol of those who we were serving. This way we carry them along with us our entire journey and continue our prayers on their behalf. We also ask them while signing our cross to offer up prayers on our behalf as we continue on our journey. Many were very intrigued and came up to us asking what it was we were doing and why we were lugging this large wooden cross down the beach. Some wrote "Thank You" notes on the cross thanking us for cleaning the beach, which was an added blessing to our journey and brought tunes of encouragement.

Further down the beach as we made our way slowly to Sunset state Beach we came across some of the most amazing displays of wild life I have ever seen in one setting. First of all it seemed as if we were being followed by a particular seal who kept bobbing his/her head above the waves to look at us; Second, we spotted some porpoises or dolphins about fifty yards off the coast; and Third we saw the largest swarm of wild marine birds I've ever seen in my life. It's almost as if every sea gull and every pelican I'd ever seen in my life (and then some) had decided to pay us a visit on the same day. They literally surrounded us and covered the horizon with Thousands of little swarming bodies.

The day was riddled with examples of divine providence. A little further down the beach and we just happened upon a group of Jesuit Volunteers (JVC's) who were on their orientation retreat (most likely at St. Francis Retreat Center) and were at that time simply sitting on the beach in contemplation of their surroundings. Then as we approached

Sunset State Beach just as the sun was setting, we noticed a group of people reverently gazing at the display. They were up the beach access stairway that we had to climb to get to the camp grounds. When we got there we found out they were Mennonites on their own retreat. So I had a little chat with a few of them and asked one of their youth to sign our cross. Of course the differences in our traditions caused some uneasiness, but I pray some grace was shared between us.

We then arrived at camp just after sun set and began setting up the tents. That evening I was honored by my sister bringing the most delicious carrot cake one could ever make (as she is a gourmet chef, and my sister) and we celebrated my Birthday. I don't think I've ever had a better birthday. And that's saying a lot, because I've been known to be in Assisi (Italy), Lourdes (France), Hawaii and World Youth Day events for my birthdays. But, though awesome in many ways, none of my other experiences could compare to this day. The group I was with, the work we were doing, the wonderful display of creation and God's Providence, and let me say it again... the people I was with; This all made for a great God Walk day and a birthday I will never forget.

DAY THREE – Aug. 10th

Day three we had a very early service project in Watsonville, so we woke early and were on the road. We shuttled to Watsonville due to time constraints, and when we got there we noticed that there was singing coming from within the Salvation Army Building. I snuck in to see that they were in the process of doing their daily morning "devotion" or worship. I then ran out to tell the rest of the group and we filed into one of the back pews of their little sanctuary. We sang with them a few songs and heard the small sermon given by a catholic woman with a heavy accent I couldn't pin point. She was very glad to see us come in and double the size of their usual group of devotees. After the service we all introduced ourselves and had people there sign our cross.

We were then introduced to the task we were in charge of maintaining. We went into their stock rooms and filled bags with various goods till they were full and almost bursting and then lined them up for the recipients who would come to the door where some of our crew were receiving them. We worked until noon that day at the Salvation Army and the director even put us in charge for a period of time when she had to go to an appointment. We also helped restock their supplies when the van came filled with donated goods. Due to the low traffic that day, being that it was still close to the beginning of the month and people were not quite out of money by then, we also had a little bit of time to unwind and play a few rounds of cards. The Salvation Army was a great service and I think really affirmed the leadership of our God Walk team. The staff at the Salvation Army gave us such reasonability it made us really feel that we were on the same level and working for the same purpose and capable of doing what was necessary. It was a mutually empowering experience.

At noon we closed up shop and were off to lunch in Watsonville. There we also found an internet café where we used Edwin's laptop and wireless internet connection to send out

the first couple of day's updates. From there we were off to our camp ground at Royal Oaks Camp between Watsonville and Castroville and about three miles inland. The walk was breathtaking as we got to San Miguel Canyon Road and entered the little valley there. The scenery was so green, diverse and tranquil as the oak trees' gnarly branches arched over the road, and the eucalyptuses (though biologically intrusive being that they are not native) beautifully towered over the other native trees on the hillsides creating a dramatic setting for our walk. The camp we stayed at was no less breathtaking, and an added blessing is that it was all reserved for our group. So there we set up our tents under the canopy of oaks and prepared for the evening.

Carol Thornton from Sr. Mary's Lost Gatos and Nancy Pontier from St. Lucy's (both from San Jose) came and provided a very hospitable dinner for us at the camp site which as a great service to us. It took the stress of preparing a meal off our shoulders giving us enough time to set up camp with the remaining twilight. And it was great to share their fellowship for that part of our journey. The evening was spent in fellowship and laughter as our voices echoed through the oak wooded canyon and tranquility reigned graciously over us all.

DAY FOUR – Aug. 11th

The morning of day four was spent, along with the usual feeding and breaking down camp, by labeling multiple water bottles with notes of “¡Gracias!” which were all to be distributed later that day to the farm workers on the outskirts of Castroville. This was a thank you for all of the work that they did, day in and day out, in doing the hard jobs for us so that we can all sit in comfortable office chairs and type away at our computers to earn a living. It is also a thank you of solidarity and of breaking down boundaries that separate “them” from “us.” While we can not at this time change the systems that keep them doing the hard work and us well fed and doing the easy work for more pay, we hope that these ¡Gracias! will be a testimony that we, to the best of our ability, walk with them and have them in our hearts and on our minds.

When all was packed and all of the water bottles were labeled, we made our way out of Royal Oaks and began our walk toward Castroville. The first farm we came upon was a strawberry field. Their some of our support drivers, namely Laura Chiu (who was our rotating support driver of the day) began negotiations with the staff of the farm trying to gain us permission to enter the grounds and offer our bottles of water to the workers. The staff, though cordial, were apprehensive to the idea and we had to go through a network of radio communications with the owner of the farm before we were given permission. After waiting about an hour or more we were finally given permission to send a group, but we could not enter the field we were next to due to the fact that they were spraying (why it didn't stop them from working their crop pickers at that time I don't know, I guess pesticides are more harmful to none farm workers then they are to crop pickers... or maybe not). So we sent a delegation of three of our older and better Spanish speaking God Walker's to be shuttled to a nearby field where they were not spraying. When they got there the workers were on their break so there was time for a little socializing and

goofing around. The gifts were well received and the workers signed our cross as a symbol that we carry them with us and that they are praying for us as we continue our walk.

By that point there was little time to visit any other fields so we continued on to our next lodging at Our Lady of Refuge (appropriate) Catholic Church in Castroville. There we unpacked and got ready for the evening, and were given a lot of time to decompress. That evening we tasted the fruit of the land as we had boiled artichokes. We also ordered pizza from a local dinner which kept it's doors open for us a few minutes after closing so that we could get the pizza (which we only noticed as leaving). Laura Chiu showed off her hospitality skills and hospitable nature as she got everything organized and all of the food set out for us tired walkers.

DAY FIVE – Aug. 12th

This day we got out of Castroville early to make our noon appointment at Dorothy's Place in Salinas. We walked through unbroken farm fields between Castroville and Salinas. Having still about half or more of the water bottles with the thank you notes on them with us from the day before, we found a group of farm workers picking cauliflower near the road we were walking. So I went out to the workers and talked to their manager who gave us immediate access to the farm lands, where we distributed our gifts directly to the farm workers and tried to communicate with them in our broken Spanish. I told them we were "caminando de Mission Santa Cruz a Mission Camel," (something to the effect of "walking from ... to ...") to give them an idea of what we were doing and tried to convey to them that the bottles were a gift of "¡Gracias para su trabajo!" as was written on many of them ("thanks for your hard work"). What really made the symbol of reciprocity is when we asked them to sign our cross. This way we were receiving something in return from them, which gave us both the dignity deserved, and made it seem much less like a hand out.

We arrived at Dorothy's Place on Soledad St. (Salinas) just in time for our appointment. We were able to meet a group of students from Notre Dame High School in Belmont who were also there with their campus ministry leaders for a service project. We had a bit of discussion with them and had them sign our Cross, then we got hard at work serving the many who come to that kitchen every day for their lunch. There were so many volunteers there that day (it seemed as if Dorothy's place double booked us) that some who had little to do were able to mix with the dinners and strike up conversations with them. We met some bright and cheerful characters, including a young family who needed these meals to get through the month and make the rent. The Pilgrim Cross made it's way through the dining area as people sign it and asked questions about what we were doing and shared their stories. As always Dorothy's place is filled with joyful sounds even in the midst of the struggles that all who were present face daily. After the meal and fellowship we cleaned and moped the facilities, stacked chairs and cleaned the dishes.

We then crossed the street to the empty lot there on Soledad St.. There we all grabbed a trash bag and rubber gloves and proceeded to clean the lot free of all trash, as well as the entire street and side walk. And let me tell you, there was a lot. We worked for about forty five minutes and after words the street and lot looked ten times more dignified then before. This is going to have to be an ongoing service that God Walkers do in the future because that street and lot are always in need of cleaning, and it seams very few volunteer to do the work.

From there we were off across town to St. Mary of the Nativity who, thanks to Lupe the youth director, their youth team, and their Pastor, opened their doors to us so we could use their youth hall for lodging. On the way we were greeted by a cheerful young man who, noticing our cross, was wondering were we were going. We told him we were going to St. Mary's and he said, "Me Too!" He was holding a prayer book in his hand and wearing a yellow St. Mary of the Nativity shirt that their Youth Group had made. He then walked with us and conversed with Edwin in Edwin's broken Spanish, and he lead us on a shorter rout to the church as I checked the map to make sure we were going in the right direction. We arrived at the church in no time and Lupe arrived short after (as we were a little early). She and her youth group team proceeded to serve us freshly made Mexican food of the soft taco variety. Their hospitality shined, especially as their group was in the middle of planning for a great festival that was to take place that weekend.

That evening we had a great discussion and reflection on the God Walk up to that point and all that we had learned. One of the insights we were not expecting is the response we received, overwhelmingly positive and inquisitive, from carrying our Pilgrim Cross along the journey. It became an ice breaker for many who opened up to us with their stories and support. And it became a community building symbol for all of us. It also kept our minds on the mission we were on and the focus we needed, making all of our actions a prayer, mindful of our God. With that on our minds and with a closing prayer, we were off to sleep.

DAY SIX – Aug. 13th

Day six was our day of endurance as it was our last walk before our day of rest. We left early from St. Mary's and made our way to the Monterey – Salinas Hwy. When we reached it we stopped for lunch, we then shuttled passed the part of the highway that was freeway and dangerous to walk. About five miles down the road we were dropped off were the highway became walkable again. We then walked to the park and ride which was near our mountain pass over to Camel Valley.

There we meet Charles when we asked him if there was a bathroom near the park and ride. He then asked us what we were doing and when we told him he became very interested. Our testimony struck a cord deep in his soul and his personal struggles as he shared how much our act of faith and testimony to peace meant to him. Unfortunately I had to take a call from one of the support drivers in the middle of our conversation, but

from what I gathered from the rest of the conversation, and from asking questions of our group afterwards, he told the following story about his own personal history:

He had been sent to the Vietnam war where he had to kill a man which had shook his being very deep and made him think about his actions in a hard light. He later was sent back to Vietnam where he and his group of men, much to the efforts of his leadership, refused to fight as they proceeded to bury their weapons in the ground. Later in his life, after much reflection, meditation and prayer he was convinced in his heart that he had to make right, in some way, what he had wronged during his time in the military. He was convinced in his heart that he had to go to Vietnam, find the family of the man he had killed, and ask their forgiveness for what he had done. Receiving that forgiveness from them was something he needed in the root of his soul and making that act of reconciliation was what he felt God called him to. So this is what he did which changed his life forever. I think it true that sometimes it's harder to ask forgiveness than it is to forgive, in doing so we humble ourselves admitting we were wrong which is not so much considered a virtue in our society as it should be. We are so intoxicated with the need to justify ourselves that our pride gets in the way of real, honest human experience and intimacy.

We then continued down the road a bit until we shuttled over the more dangerous parts of the mountain pass. Being dropped off at the bottom of the hill we continued our walk into Carmel Valley, the small town with the most hospitable small church.

That evening we participated in their 5:30 pm evening mass where a remnant of their community greeted us, some very friendly and welcoming characters indeed. There we met the new pastor of their community who was very kind, and welcomed us back next year.

For dinner we warmed up the quesadillas that my students had provided for us that day from their family restaurant "La Bamba" in Mountain View. The food was plentiful and protein rich, which was great for us walkers.

Later on we had a Vigil Teize prayer service in the church by candle light (in the Teize custom), which included a foot washing ceremony much like that of our Holy Thursday Liturgy. This for us God Walkers is a liturgical symbol or even "sacramental" experience of Christ's own humble gift to us and our necessity to continue that gift; for "no servant is greater than his master" and if he as "washed [our] feet, so to should [we] wash the feet of one another."

After that, and some fellowship, we were off to bed where the appointed wake up time for the next morning was set at the strict time of "whenever you walk up" in keeping with the Sabbath theme of the coming day.

DAY SEVEN – Aug. 14th

As it is written, *on the seventh day God rested and made it holy*. This is the culmination of the creation story and is a theme of justice and reverence in our Judeo Christian Tradition. This day people woke up at varying times as suggested above, between 9:00am and 11:00 am. This was much deserved rest for the walkers. When everyone was up and we were eating our brunch I made the theme talk of the day on “the Sabbath Principle,” drawing from the scripture tradition of justice a principle of mandatory rest. If a people or a person is not given the freedom to rest at least on full day out of the week then he or she or they are intrinsically being oppressed by some system that keeps them from living balanced lives. While some don’t rest out of personal imbalances, most don’t rest because they have no choice, they have to keep afloat, and this is a tremendous injustice of our society. Our society is set up so that people can’t provide for themselves and stay in community with each other given the time of the week provided. People are not able to rest on the Sabbath day in our society not because they don’t have enough to live on, which in many cases is dramatically true; but most of us have enough to live on except that our society expects us to have so much more in order to be participants in it. Our culture more and more is negating the human and the simple, while favoring the more “complex” and mechanical, making machines, systems and programs the measure of all things, rather than the humanity and community the proper measure.

So this day, while really necessary, is a built in lesson. We spent some time wondering around Carmel Valley’s small down town as our God Walkers browsed the internet and just took it easy for a day. Edwin and I did a little bit of “plucking the grain” to use biblical allusions (like Jesus disciples who “worked on the Sabbath because they were hungry”) as we updated the web site with a few more God Walk Journal Updates.

I also met a local artist who has a gallery next door to the Coffee Shop we were at who was an Eastern Orthodox and a contemporary impressionistic (as well as other styles) painter. He told me how he had restored some Churches in the Mediterranean area. Then I brought him our cross to sign which he did, he also drew with the sharpie marker a little cherub in his contemporary style. Now our cross adorns the original of a local master.

That evening we participated in Our Lady of Mount Carmel’s Saturday evening liturgy and we met a number of the community who were there for worship. We also met a Missionary sister who was there with an appeal to the community for support of her orders missionary efforts. Many from the community signed our Cross and gave us their blessings. The rest of the evening was spent in fellowship and reflection on the past week.

DAY EIGHT – Aug. 15th

Since I wrote the Journal update for day eight I will simply repeat it here just as it is written in the updates. Enjoy and read past it to my closing comments:

The God Walk has truly been a formative and inspiring experience for all involved, including the countless people we meet along the road with whom we exchange stories.

Day eight is our day of “Culmination and New Beginning.” Here we reached the end of our god walk, but only the beginning of the greater GOD WALK for which this week has been a preparation. This is the overarching theme of the day, a theme of celebration on both fronts.

The day started with waking and getting ready for the final walk that would bring us to Carmel Mission Basilica. After morning reflections and prayers our feet hit the road, down out of Carmel Valley where we had been given the greatest of hospitality from the staff and Pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church. We walked the country road with our Pilgrim Cross, and all were in good spirits.

Along the road, as you can imagine, we commanded a reaction out of many who passed us. It’s hard to ignore a group of young people walking down the street wearing bright orange hats (for safety) and carrying a large wooden cross. And not for the first time we were approached by someone who was really touched by our witness.

A woman, who passed us on the road, turned around and parked near our support vehicle in order to greet us when we reached that point. She started off with the usual question to the effect of, “What are you doing this for, why are you carrying this cross?” And to that we all fumbled out our answer describing the God Walk as “something between a retreat, a walk-o-thon, a pilgrimage, a service project” and whatever other spin our God Walkers felt inclined to put on the experience. Then, very happy to see such a testimony, this woman offered each a different question, directed to our individual spiritual experience. She asked one by one, “what has brought *you* to Christ?” We all offered our varying responses, most of which testified to a movement of God throughout our lives and through the example and inspiration found in community.

She then began to open up to us and tell us freely of her tragic history, a history of abuse and hypocrisy. She told us of how her family had abused her for years, yet she was being raised “in the church” to make it seem as if everything was fine to onlookers. She then told of how she had continued her life “in the church” but was not truly living the life of Christ in her heart. Then tragedy struck once again for her which gave her a renewed perspective on the life of faith. She was able to overcome much of the hurt and scars of her past, and live a life of love and forgiveness through an authentic faith in relationship with Christ. She then continued to encourage us to live a life in faith and love of God and to never give it up. After all of our conversation, when she was about to leave, she asked us if we would pray with her to which we all willingly accepted. We all placed our hands on the cross we had been carrying and shared a moment of grace and blessing for the journey as she led us in prayer. After parting greetings she was off like an angel, come simply to bring a message of hope and grace.

Then we continued down the road toward our destination passing rhymes, songs and jokes between us as well as taking turns carrying the cross. We arrived at the mission with enough time that the team could break up and do a little browsing around the mission grounds. We then meet together in front of the Mission Basilica to talk with the

celebrant about the Blessing Rite we were to participate in during their 5:30 liturgy, and our Closing/New Beginning liturgy (“Culmination and New Beginning”).

We processed in with our pilgrim cross, bearing the signatures of approximately 230 people who we had met along the road throughout the week, to the entrance song. We walk between the cross bearer, ministers and the Celebrant. Bowing with the rest of the procession we placed our Pilgrim Cross before the sanctuary (off to the side) and took our places among the congregation.

We then were introduced by the celebrant to the assembly. There we participated in the rest of the liturgy where the Father gave a homily on the visitation/magnificate and God being a God of surprises. Then after communion and the communion meditation we were invited up by the Celebrant to stand before the sanctuary to receive a blessing. He proceeded to bless our individual crosses and then give us the “Blessing of Pilgrims Before They Return” along with the entire congregation. We were honored to receive such a blessing and it truly capped the experience as well as invigorate us to continue on living the mission we had been given by Christ to be “the servants of the rest.” After the Celebrant blessed the entire congregation we participated again, with our pilgrim cross, in the recession out the doors of the Basilica. There we were greeted after mass by many who were intrigued with our mission and our work.

After final pictures, a closing prayer and goodbyes we all departed to our respective parts of the globe empowered to make of it a new creation and spread God’s love and joy wherever our feet fall.

CLOSING COMMENTS:

This experience has taught us all a great deal about what it takes to be a disciple of Christ in our world today. During the God Walk we faced many of the challenges that this world and our society is offering us in these times. It’s more than simply studying them in books and theorizing on justice and equality issues, or reading statistics and trying to find ways to manipulate the numbers back into submission. This is a much more existential experience of personal and relational confrontation. During the God Walk we are faced with the “lepers” of our society that many would, and daily do, turn their faces from in ignorance and apathy. We are confronted with those who we ourselves would be inclined to avoid, even as we call ourselves followers of Christ.

It is in this way that the God Walk opens up our hearts so that we can view more honestly what is therein. Following the one who asks us to “judge not,” we see what criticisms we place on others simply because of their appearance or stature. Following the one who says, “blessed are the poor” we are confronted with the fact that most of us walkers don’t really fall into that category, challenging us beyond our material centrality to view what is truly sacred in our lives, the people around us, and in those who have so little.

We obtain new tools for critical thinking and reflecting upon the state of society, and weather we as a human family and as an American public are really as free as we pride ourselves in being. We obtain them from first hand experience and living out our emotional response to what is not fair in our surroundings and thus in our society. We break down barriers that have been built into our socialization and psyche for our entire lives. It is one thing to say, "I believe all are created equal in the sight of God," and an entirely different thing to *live it!* This is the credo of our American heritage, yet many do not live it, and most don't live it to it's full potential. Thus, our creed goes only fare enough to make us feel good about ourselves, but not far enough to actually make us, or our society fully good.

Many view "cliques" to be a high school or adolescent problem, but this is not the case. Our society is full of exclusion and high scholars are simply reflecting what they see in society and the tendencies they have been raised with. By participating in the God Walk, our youth and adults are placed in surroundings where the exclusiveness we didn't know we had is challenged, and our ignorance is confronted.

The God Walk also creates an atmosphere and a demeanor that brakes that ice wall down with less effort then would be necessary for one to fair it on their own; or than even would be possible for one simply volunteering in a soup kitchen or the like. By walking the miles with our own two feet we are using the primary mode of transportation that the outcaste of our culture use. We lodge in the floors of church halls like homeless do in homeless shelters. We are not guarded nor cushioned from our surroundings by our SUV interiors; which opens our senses to the smells, sights and experiences that the poor of our society call home. All of this is a lesson built in, and one that will unpack itself over many years of reflection.

Beyond all of this and with this as our guide, we are empowered to continue this walk centered on service and justice. We see through our prayers, discussions and, most of all, our actions that Jesus is not just an idea or a name used to justify ones argument. Jesus was and is a physical person with real hands, feet, actions, words and love. People were not drawn to him as much because he offered the best and most concise doctrine and the clearest way to 'be religious.' They were drawn to him because he was drawn to them. He was present and did not ignore the needs of those he came in contact with. The poor were not statistics to him, they were... and are... his friends, the ones he know well; the ones he spent late evenings talking with, and days working along side. He himself was one without a home of his own, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (matt. 8:20)

So, really, on this journey we walkers are leaving our world behind and entering the world that Jesus knows, and the roads that Jesus walks every day. And it is there that we meet Him...