

THE HISTORY OF HOLY CROSS
SPIRITUALITY IN PERU (1963-1993)

by

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And their name was George.

But wait a minute. I am getting ahead of myself in telling this story. Let me start at the beginning. Well, not exactly at the very beginning.

Once upon a time, in those days when the world was divided into two political and economic forces, when a new spiritual leader rose up to breathe fresh air into the spiritual tradition called "Catholic," there was a small group of men who had just recently begun their spiritual ministry in the East-lands. They did not have many resources and were few in number. They were struggling to make ends meet. This new spiritual leader of the "Catholic" tradition called out to them and to others to send some of their men and women to the lands in the South where the battle between the two world forces was beginning to rumble the loudest.

This small group of men had a leader. His name was George, son of DePrizio. He wanted his group to respond to this call. So he summoned three of his men and sent them off with his blessing to a land in the south called "Inca Territory." These three men did not know anything about the people in this territory nor their language. But they were men of faith and so they heartily accepted the new mission and the challenge. When they arrived in that land unknown to them (I think that it was way back when -- around that time called 1963), they encountered numerous difficulties. They were a fragile group and George knew that. So George decided to renounce his spiritual leadership in the East-lands and went south to accompany the little band of three that were struggling to adapt to the language and to the customs of the people there. Many men followed George's example in the years that followed and took the leap into the unknown, putting their health and their personal well-being at risk. Some stayed, some returned. Others shouted, "Come back! You are wasting your time." But the small group under George's leadership managed to survive those first years in that land so strange and different for them.

At the beginning, the group was in a place called Cartavio-land. As they learned the language and became acquainted with the people there, the small band of men became sensitized to the political, economic and social divisions among the people. They also began to appreciate the spiritual and faith traditions of the people. Most of the people in Cartavio-land worked in the sugar-cane fields and in the sugar factory. They lived in simple three-room nud-hut homes. The group from the East-lands were living in a ten-room home like those who were called "the elite." After much reflection, the group decided to change to a smaller house among the field and factory workers. The leaders of "the elite" cried out, "It is not fitting for spiritual leaders to live in such a house." But the men insisted on the change. For had not their God taken flesh in a stable among the shepherds rather than in the king's palace?

As they lived closer to these people called "the poor," they became more aware of their joys and their sufferings. The people began to collaborate in ministry with them even more than before. They worked together to deepen the understanding of their faith in a God who called them to rise up from their brokenness to new life and to build a world of justice and peace. In the midst of all this collaboration in ministry there were others who belonged to the same

spiritual tradition who were opposed to all this. They had lived for so long among "the elite" that it was too scary to think about living among the people called "the poor." But when the spiritual leaders of the South-lands met to unify their pastoral ministry, they called on all in the tradition "to opt for the people called 'the poor.'"

As the years went on, this little group of men who had originally come long ago from a place called "Sainte-Croix" moved on from Cartavio-land to a new place name Chimbote-land. In Chimbote-land there were around 300,000 of these people called "the poor." The Sainte-Croix group set up their tent among these steel-workers and fishermen and those who had come down from the nearby mountainous regions in search for work. "How can we minister to these people?" the group asked themselves. They met with other groups of men and women in Chimbote-land and began to work on what they called "pastoral teams." Some ministered to the young, others to the workers, others with the unemployed, others with the imprisoned and the sick, others with the people who still lived in the mountain regions. Those "pastoral teams" met together to plan ministry, to pray together and to share life. They listened to the people and attempted to respond to what they heard. These were good hope-full years. But still there were those who opposed all this ministry to "the poor." Those "pastoral teams" were often accused of not being composed of men and women of faith, but simply political agitators. It was as such a time of suffering and much misunderstanding for the little Sainte-Croix group.

But it was also a time for growth. It was during those years that the men formulated from their faith perspective what they were all about in the Inca-lands. It was also during those years that the group remembered the man who had called them together years before in Sainte-Croix. This man's name was Basil, son of Moreau. Basil had sent out the first groups from Sainte-Croix. He had sent them out -- men and women -- to minister throughout the world. Was that not why they themselves set out from the East-lands to come to the South-lands? They knew that more of their number were ministering in other parts of the South-lands. So they arranged to meet and to share together. From that first meeting around that distant year of 1975 came a new strength and a new hope for Sainte-Croix in the South-lands. Throughout the years they continued to come together on a regular basis to evaluate and plan ministry together.

As the group in Chimbote-land grew in number, they decided to spread out, first to the capital of the Inca-lands, a place called Lima-territory, where some eight million people struggled for life, and then later to the Aymara-lands. In the Lima-territory they began a grade school and a high school for the people called "the poor." They also saw the need to attend to the spiritual formation of leaders. They started schooling and training for the physically handicapped. They set up health services and worked with women's groups to begin soup-kitchens for the hungry. They were involved in human rights groups and worked for peace amidst the violence that had become widespread. They accompanied the people in their faith journey through prayer and ritual to support the faith and the hope of the people. There was always more to be done. There was always more violence.

Those who went to the Aymara-lands had to acquaint themselves with a new culture, language and religious tradition. The Aymarans were people who worked the soil. They spent

time studying the culture and the language. They saw the need to accompany those who had accepted to minister in the schools and in their farming communities on their spiritual journey.

The women from Sainte-Croix also arrived to minister in the Inca-lands. They joined with the men where they were ministering. Misunderstandings and opposition to "the option for 'the poor'" continued to be present in some circles. "Why were the women and the men of Sainte-Croix living among "the poor" in the farming communities?" some leaders complained. "Why did they not live among "the elite" in the towns?" But in spite of the complaints and misunderstandings the Sainte-Croix women and men continued firm in their dedication to live and minister among the people called "the poor."

Around that time called 1979 the men began to see that some of the young people from Inca-land were interested in joining them in the brotherhood of Sainte-Croix. This was a time of much violence and poverty throughout the land. Several young men came and left. But finally one man stayed. And his name was George, (Jorge in their language), son of Mallea and Mammi. Jorge came from the Aymara-lands. He finished his community and ministry formation and was admitted definitively to the Sainte-Croix brotherhood in February of that year 1993. Several other young men and women were following the path that Jorge had opened up for them. The group that had come from the East-lands thirty years previously had finally taken on roots in the South-lands, in that territory called Inca-land.

And their name was George. George, son of DePrizio, who had risked and stepped out into the unknown of the future because he believed in the God who constantly calls us to new life and new ministry among his people who are called "the poor." George (Jorge), son of Mallea and Mammi, who took up the "torch of Sainte-Croix" in his own land to be a light for his people in the darkness of the violence and poverty that are a daily part of their lives.

So that is my story. It does not speak of all the personal and community failings and weaknesses nor the brokenness that are a part of each life. Rather it speaks of the daring and the risking, of the stepping out from the security into the unknown. It insists on the God who gives new life and calls each one to set out on a journey and a mission of faith in collaboration with Sainte-Croix and with others.

What does the story say to Sainte-Croix today as we step out into the unknown and uncertainty of the future? What does it say about our faith and our hope in our journey with God and his people called "the poor?" If the story says something to us, then I have not wasted our time in telling it to you.