

From our Unification Church Missionary in El Salvador - My Special 30th Birthday

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I want to relate a brief experience I had on my birthday. It wasn't a particularly outstanding day. I mean it didn't start out that way. About 4:30 p.m. a friend invited me to a movie, "Three Days of the Condor." When the film ended we went to a coffee shop and had a cup of tea. It had begun to rain a bit. She decided she wanted to go to church that night and asked if I'd come with her. I didn't feel the inclination so I took her to the church and left her at the door. From there it was only a few blocks to the center of town. I decided to walk in the rain and think a bit. The colored neon signs glowed against the cloudy darkness and the pavement glistened with the drizzle drops. It had been hot that day so the rain was a welcome refreshment.

As I walked I thought, "This is my 30th birthday; I'm beginning my 31st year of life. This day should be special somehow." I walked on and as I approached the main area of town I began to notice the many beggars sitting under the eaves and awnings. It wasn't particularly different; they always abound. But as I saw them huddled here and there to keep dry my heart was somehow touched. I wanted to cry because I thought what a sad fate. It wasn't so much because of any thought I had; I just felt a desire to cry. The rain sort of created a tearful environment and I imagined that heaven was weeping. Save for the beggars there were very few people on the street.

I was inspired with the idea that what would make my day special would be to share it with someone. I decided to buy a bag of doughnuts and give them out to the beggars. I ran around looking for a pastry shop which might be open but none was found. "How frustrating," I thought.

Then I saw two women with five children huddled under the eaves of a Catholic bookstore. One of the women looked young (30) and the other not much older, maybe 45. I asked them what circumstances brought them to be on the street like this and they told me their sad and tragic stories. I couldn't help it, I had to do something at least for them. I went down the street to a place like Kentucky Fried Chicken and bought enough for the seven of them. Two of the children were asleep when I got back but the smell of the chicken awakened them.

The older woman accepted my gift with a rather quiet kind of politeness. She had nothing to lose being herself. I mean there was no phony acting nice. She just took it and said thank you and didn't even open the box. I asked her some very frank questions and told her that I would help her in the coming weeks if she wanted help. I told her all she had to do was give me a call (her five percent). She said she would then said, "You must be a saint." I said "No, it is you who is the saint. I have some way to keep myself alive but you must bear the shame of society." She began to cry and then caught herself and smiled. It was the first time she had smiled I guess in a long, long time. It came from within.