

# The face of Christ

What a privilege in 2005 - a sabbatical year at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio.

While there, I met Katy and her three children. Katy cleaned the building where I lived, and her children did their homework at our residence. This summer I returned to Texas for her daughter Erica's graduation from high school.

Erica and her best friend Brenda were graduating among the best and brightest of their class and were both accepted into the business school at The University of Texas. The difference is Erica will be able to go to UT and Brenda will not, because our country will not pass the DREAM Act.

The DREAM Act would allow students raised, but not born, in the U.S. to attend college. Brenda, who was brought to the U.S. at the age of 2, has lived 16 years on this side of the border. Both Brenda and Erica are true Americans. Brenda just doesn't have papers. Both cried after graduation - Brenda because she could not continue to UT and Erica because of the injustice done to her friend.

That day Katy planned a small graduation party for Erica at a nearby Mexican restaurant. She had sacrificed much for her children by cleaning offices and homes six days a week for years. Erica, too, had gone to school, worked with her mom cleaning after school, and still managed to graduate in the top 10 of her class.

At graduation, Katy found out that Brenda's family could not afford a party so — right on the spot — she invited them to come to Erica's party. The family of 10 arrived and all were welcomed as if the party had been planned that way all along.

Before the end of the party Katy, as hostess of the event, invited anyone who wanted to speak "un deseo" (a wish) for the graduates to do so. One by one everyone took a turn offering their "deseo" for the girls. I was moved to tears by the beauty and simplicity of the prayers and wishes.

When Tío Jorge spoke, he reminded Erica and Brenda that he had crossed the Rio Grande to follow his dream of providing for his family. He asked God's blessing on

them, praying that they might follow their dreams despite the many setbacks and difficulties along the way. The party was very special. The Holy Spirit was truly present. It reminded me of a line I had read that morning that “the next face you see may be the face of Christ.” I met Christ during the fiesta that afternoon. The face of Christ shone through the eyes of the people at the party.

Felipe, Erica’s 16-year-old brother, had gotten a job at Freddy’s Hamburger and Ice Cream. The next day with his first pay check, he treated his mother, sisters, and me to lunch to celebrate Erica’s graduation. Again, I saw the face of Christ.

That evening three of us toured the downtown in a river boat. It was delightful and the boat driver was “tan simpático” (so very kind). One of the women asked his name. “Josue,” he replied. “Spell it,” she asked. “J-o-s-u-e.” Then he shared the story of a teacher he had in school who pronounced his name like Joe-sue. He tried to give her the correct pronunciation but she arrogantly insisted, “In America we speak English.” Josue has never forgotten the humiliation of that day when all the class laughed at the boy with a “girl’s” name. Josue has been deployed to Iraq twice and will probably be returning to Afghanistan – defending his country, our country, for that teacher and all of us. His face was the face of Christ.

As Martin Buber said, “All real living is meeting,” meeting Christ in our brothers and sisters. Breathe deeply. The next face you see may be the face of Christ.

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