

# We need to have the open arms of Christ

True connections happen when people get to know each other as, well, people, with unique faces and stories and personalities. When people get to know, well, people, miraculous things happen. Blind eyes see. A woman stops bleeding. Lazarus comes back to life. This is the Gospel of Jesus. Truly get to know someone, have a holy and healthy relationship with them, and they become Jesus to you!

Four years ago while in El Salvador, I tried to write about my encounters with Jesus in the more than 300 people I met through Baltimore-based **Catholic Relief Services'** Called to Witness program. As I continue to count that experience as a life-changing one, I thought it important, even critical, with the tragedies happening to our brothers and sisters at the border, that I introduce you to some of brothers and sisters I met (and who may be desperately attempting to flee violence and poverty at this moment).

**Meet Christian.** Christian is now only 19 but, along with his mom and two younger siblings, he started a piñata-making business because there was no other way.

**Meet 100 people of 3-4 villages,** mostly women and children, gathering in a town hall to receive skills on how to be strong families. Seventy five percent of them had to be picked up by CRS and taken to the town hall for fear of walking through gang zones.

**Meet Anita,** mother of a 'disappeared migrant,' who has been searched for her son for 15 years. **Meet Philip and Luis,** who, along with Anita, make up Cofamide and search for countless migrants who are nowhere to be found and whose families grieve.

**Meet Mallie, Rudy, Hannah and Pauly,** rowdy young people who accompanied us to the grave of St. Oscar Romero, a hero of the people martyred for standing by them.

Meet **Juan Antonio,** who knew St. Romero personally, and passionately emphasized

“It was the Spirit of God that spoke through Romero” especially when Romero proclaimed, the day before he died, “In the name of God, in the name of those people whose lamentations rise up, I beg you, I implore you to cease this oppression!”

Are any of these the people who are being oppressed or mistreated at the border? Are they the ones being turned away and told they must return to the abuse that they left?

This divisiveness and hatred at the border is personal for me. I am forever touched by their presence in my life, by their faces and names and stories. I am also touched by those people I did not have the honor of meeting, those brothers and sisters (mostly Catholic!) who deserve so much more as human beings than they are receiving.

I am a better person because I have seen the face of Jesus in them and I want to be a better person, family member, Catholic, citizen because of them. We need to be a better nation, too, and, with **arms open** like Jesus on the cross, be there to offer hope and healing and hospitality to our neighbors, our family in need. Please join with me in praying and in acting for the people of El Salvador and all peoples in our family of faith.