

YO NO COMPRENDE DADDY. WHY DO YOU HAVE TO GO AWAY TO HONDURAS TO HELP OTHER PEOPLE?

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Pre-Mass Ritual. Photo by Howard S. Muscott

Padre Ricardo Donahue is adored and admired by the Hondurans in the communities he serves in and around Jutilcalpa, Honduras. “Padre,” as the children refer to him, is showered with affection by two children from Jutilcalpa upon arrival at church for Sunday mass. Padre built this church and he continues to hold weekly mass here.

Dear God:

A few weeks ago my daddy told me he was going on a trip with a team of people from a church to a country called Honduras in a place called Central America. When I asked him why, he told me most children in Honduras don’t get a good education because most of the teachers have no training and there is little or no money for books and supplies. He also said most children with disabilities never even get a chance to go to school at all. “God calls upon all of us to do *mitzvahs* or good deeds for others,” he said that night as he put me to bed. “God wants me to help the children of Honduras so he’s asked me to go to see Padre Ricardo Donahue. Padre Ricardo built the only special education school in Honduras nine years ago and he needs me to help train the teachers.” “How long will you be gone this time daddy?” I asked him trying to hold back my tears. “Only 8 days my love,” he said, “but this time I won’t be able to call you because there won’t be any telephones where I am staying.”

As I fell off to sleep that night I just kept worrying. How can I last 8 days without hearing my daddy’s voice, cuddling with him in the ball pit, and playing with him after school? Who will read to me, tuck me in with a kiss and pray with me at bedtime? Who will say, “*Te quiero*, Nathan, I love you,” when they turn off the light? Eight days is too long. So God, I really need to ask you why my daddy has to go to Honduras to help other people instead of staying home with me. *Yo no comprende*. Please help me understand.

A few nights before he left, I asked him again, “Daddy, why do you need to go far away and help other people?” He told me he helps because he can, but I didn’t understand and was too tired to ask more questions. My daddy is a teacher in New Hampshire and he helps children, families, and teachers all the time. Why can’t he just help more people here? Why must he go far away to another country when I need him too? *Yo no comprende*, God. Please help me understand.

The next night at bedtime, he tried to explain it to me again. “Nathan my son,” he said, “since you were a little baby I’ve been telling you love is the greatest gift a person can give to another. Do you remember? “Yes daddy, I remember.” “Well, daddy has enough love in his heart for you, mommy, and others, not only in America, but around the world. You see Nathan unlike most other things love grows when you give it away. It may be hard for you to understand, but the more love you give to others the bigger your heart gets and the bigger your heart gets the more love you have to give to others.” He told me if I don’t believe it, I should just look at how big the hearts of the people who went with him on the trip have become. Now God, how is that possible? I thought when you give something away there is less of it, not more. My first grade teacher Mrs. Niland calls it subtraction. *Yo still no comprende*, God. Please help me understand.

That night, I woke up and couldn’t get back to sleep so I woke daddy up and told him I didn’t want him to go away. “If you really loved me, you wouldn’t go away,” I said. “Come sit on my lap,” he said, and I’ll tell you why God wants me to go. God puts each of us on this earth with special gifts for a purpose Nathan. My purpose is to teach others how to teach and to learn to be a better teacher myself.” Then daddy said the gift of being a good teacher you planted in him must also be shared with the people of Honduras, not just with the privileged people in America. He said his sacrifices in Honduras are small compared to those of others like Padre Ricardo, Padre Ramundo, Mary Roy, Doug Desrosiers and others. He told me he gets many more gifts from the people he serves than he gives to them. He said he sees in the people of Honduras a work ethic, a dignity of spirit and a compassion for family that make him feel small by comparison. He told me for the little he gives and the small sacrifices he makes, he has been given back the gift of new American and Honduran friends, some of whom will last for the rest of his life. He said the love he gets from helping others helps him love me and mommy even more. But God, please tell me why must he go away to help people and leave me? *Yo still no comprende*. Please, help me understand.

The next morning I woke up early and found him packing. “Don’t you love me and mommy most of all?” I asked him. “Of course I do,” he said. It’s easy to love you and mommy and to care for people who are like us. But the greatest love,” he said, “is the love you give when you take a risk, when you do something that requires sacrifice, when you care for people who appear to be different, very different than yourself.” Do you know what he did then God? He took my hand, put it on his heart and told me that it takes great sacrifice to leave his greatest loves – mommy and me behind – to go to a place like Honduras where it might not be safe to drink the water, where he won’t be comfortable with the food, or the bed, or the bugs, or the heat, and maybe even some of the people. He told me these sacrifices, along with the greatest sacrifice of all – not being able to see or talk to me and mommy – would be worth it if he could help these children have a better school experience and ultimately a better life. Then he looked me in the eyes and started to cry. “What’s wrong daddy?” I asked him. “You and mommy are also making great sacrifices when you take care of each other while I’m away,” he said. “That’s the way you love and care for me and the people of Honduras at the same time.” You mean I am helping the people of Honduras too daddy? “Yes, of course you are,” he said as he wiped his tears away. Do you know what God, I think I’m starting to *comprende*.

When it was time to go, he sat me down in his lap in the rocking chair and told me one more story, his story. “Nathan, there is one more important reason I help others and I think you are old enough now to hear it. I help other people because other people believed in me and helped me when I needed it. He told me about the sacrifices his mother Naomi, my grandmother, made when she was pregnant with him and had to leave his father, my grandfather, because of his drinking problem and violent behavior. “Raising a child on your own without a husband was a difficult thing for your grandmother to do,” he

said. Then he told me of the sacrifices made by his sister, my Aunt Shelly, who took care of him when he was only 5 years old after his mother had a stroke and was paralyzed on one side. He told me he helps because of the help he got from some of his teachers who became substitute fathers when he needed them growing up. "I do it," he said "for all the people who believed in me during my life and for those who believe in you too." You know God, now that I'm telling you what he told me about our family, I am really starting to *comprende*.



Bound for Honduras. Photograph by Howard S. Muscott.

Obtaining, sorting, and packing medical, dental and other supplies is a long and tedious process. My son Nathan Muscott helped out the 2006 Team by sorting *Beanie Babies* and packing *Hot Wheels*.

I just remembered one more thing. As he got out of the rocking chair to leave for real, he gave me a big hug and a kiss and said, "Someday you'll do more than take care of mommy, give away some of your toys, and pack Beanie Babies and Hot Wheels for the children of Honduras while I'm away Nathan. Someday, God will call upon you to do great *mitzvahs* and help other people just like I do." "How do you know that?" I asked him. "I know you will because you can and because God made your heart as big as the earth and the sky combined. I know you will because I believe in you and that belief is another of God's greatest gifts. "I'm sure you will," he said, "because a great circle of life, of love, and of belief has surrounded you from the day you were adopted and that circle cannot be broken. You will bring more love and joy to people through caring than I ever will because you are the product of your mommy's love, and her love is the greatest love on earth."

Do you know what God? I am starting not only to *comprende*, but to believe him too. I am learning that the greatest gift is love with sacrifice. I promise to love with sacrifice while my daddy is gone to Honduras to help other people, but I still want him to come home soon. “Do you *comprende* me God?”
Amen,

Nathan Muscott, age 6 ½

P.S.: Guess what God, daddy just called on a satellite phone to say he'll be home tomorrow. He said he missed me so much. “But daddy,” I said, it hasn't been that long, it's only been 8 days!” I can't be sure, but I think he was crying on the other end of the phone.

Note: The Mary Queen of Peace Church in Salem, New Hampshire has sponsored 14 spiritual missions to bring medical and educational teams to Honduras. These trips continue to be aimed at helping the Hondurans with their challenges of extreme poverty and powerless. These mission trips are not sponsored, endorsed, supported, or affiliated with Rivier College.

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