

## "A Celebration of Franciscan History"



*Mass at Blanco Canyon, May 12, 2008*

By Chrystal Holley, SFO, and Dr. Larry Holley, SFO

My husband and I recently attended a much-anticipated rendezvous close to five hundred years in the making. Surrounded by beef cattle and mesquite trees, in a broad expanse of canyon land, bordered by a small tree-lined stream and accented by potholes, cactus, and cow patties, we gathered with a group of some forty Catholics from the Diocese of Lubbock, Texas, around a portable altar on private ranch land. We were keenly aware that we stood on the same ground that had felt the imprint of Conquistador boots and Indian sandals at another Mass there five centuries before. To be exact, four hundred and sixty-six springs had passed since Fray Juan de Padilla, OFM, celebrated Mass in Blanco Canyon, one of Captain-General Francisco Vasquez de Coronado's two main Texas campsites during the expedition of 1540-41. Now, on May 12, 2008, the Most Reverend Placido Rodriguez, CMF, bishop of the Diocese of Lubbock, and a representative sampling of his flock, had gathered at the same spot to celebrate the Liturgy of the Mass just as Coronado's Franciscan chaplain did: the same liturgy, in the same language – Latin -- and even with a similar Spanish accent, because Bishop Rodriguez was born in Mexico. And my husband and I were blessed to be the Secular Franciscans invited to attend.

What brought about this celebration in Blanco Canyon near Floydada, Texas? It was because of a find by Jimmy Owens in 1990, of a chain mail gauntlet. Anthropologist Dr. Donald Blakeslee and his students, from Wichita State University in Kansas, explored and excavated the area, establishing beyond reasonable doubt that Coronado and his expedition did indeed call Blanco Canyon home for a time in 1541. Dr. Blakeslee has

even been able to point out the probable position of Fray Juan de Padilla's altar. As Bishop Placido explained, the Franciscan presence on the expedition was instrumental in bringing Christ to this part of the world. Fray Padilla, who would be martyred in three years, and three other Franciscan friars were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the three hundred soldiers and twelve hundred Tlaxcalteca Indians from the interior of Mexico, all baptized Catholic Christians, who were also on the expedition.

Now here Larry and I stood, united with our brothers and sisters in Christ across time and space, united by the same faith, the same belief, the same Eucharist, and the same Jesus - our Hope. We became profoundly aware of our responsibility to carry on this mission of sharing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with a world in great need. Our God is indeed an awesome God!

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