

September 22, 2007

How could anyone love a Quechua?

How do you love these rural Quechuas? They live in dirt and rarely bathe or shower. Their hands are filthy and they insist on shaking yours and giving you an Andean hug.

They smell bad. The women carry their children in a shawl on their back. The kids do not wear pampers. The smell of urine is pervasive. They never wash their hands before eating. Their food preparation is literally in the dirt.



Their diet is mainly starch. They begin to look like the potatoes they eat, short and round. They have no health care or dentistry. Most are missing some teeth. They wear layer upon layer of clothing to keep warm. The clothes are rarely washed because they have to travel long distances to find a filthy pool to do laundry.

It is difficult to find creature comforts when you visit them. Beds are often on the dirt floors. Dishes are rarely washed; sanitation non-existent.

Strangely, I found myself enjoying their company. They were so accepting and fun loving. They loved giving me odd Quechua clothing and laughing at me when I wore it. The kids were non-stop in wanting their picture taken and hands held. Adults wanted their picture taken beside me, the giant from Canada. At least three things happened to show me how to love the rural Quechua:

### 1) I observed these literacy workers

Some of these men and women have been working in the villages for 25 years. They leave home for 3 weeks a month to live and sleep in the dirt with these people. They exude love and concern. Hundreds of lives have been transformed because of their efforts. Churches have been planted in the desolate mountains. They do not do it for money. The pay is paltry. They cry when they talk about the needs of their people. It's easy to love a Quechua.



## 2) A little child

I see thousands of kids on these visits. They all love it when you show them some attention. They are shy and scared of this tall white guy at first. After the initial encounter, they warm up and respond like kids do universally.



Quechua children are the same. Quechuas are suppressed, discriminated against and despised by many Bolivians. Peruvians do not want to be around them for reasons noted above. Adult Quechua rarely look at themselves as equal, children doubly so. Self esteem is a bizarre foreign concept.

A little child, about 5 or 6 years old entered the crowded little church and looked with big eyes at this strange, tall white guy sitting at the front with a goofy Quechua hat on his head. I smiled at her and she instantly ran towards me! The usual child's response is to hide behind their mother's skirt. She jumped in my lap and gave me a big hug, even though her arms only went halfway around. (she was small) I hugged her and she went slowly back to her mom, still smiling at me. I began filling out adoption papers immediately.

I have no idea what gave her the confidence to run to me, but I know the Lord sure used that little girl to grab my heart. It's easy to love a Quechua.

## 3) Our Journey, September 13th

The following morning, I was reading a devotional from 'Our Journey'. I am running a little behind in September! It is really talking about spiritual deadness and religious ritual. We do all the right stuff and God is not impressed. We see no fruit.

Isaiah 58: says about true religion, "...is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover him?" (vs 6-7) "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness..." (vs 10-11). God makes it easy to love a Quechua.

I have long passed the point of finding travel pleasurable. There is little desire to see another mountain, river or vista. My time with people is always the highlight. It is like God has his hand on my shoulder saying "see, these people are just like you but without hope and opportunity. He wants me to practice true religion, from the heart that responds to injustice and poverty.

It is an amazing privilege to have the resources we do in Canada and the opportunity to share them with the poorest-of-the-poor. I do not judge people who do not. They have not had the privilege of seeing these things first hand. The truly poor (destitute) have a special place in God's heart.

Thirty years ago I put on my office wall, the verse, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord and He will pay back what He has given." (Proverbs 19:17). It is great to have the God of the universe as guarantor for these 'loans.'

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