

25th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of Sister



María Agustina Rivas, RGS

On September 27 we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of our Sister María Agustina Rivas López, murdered by the terrorist group “Sendero Luminoso” (Shining Path), in Florida, Peru Central Jungle.

Who was "Aguchita", as she was affectionately called? She was born on June 13, 1920, in Coracora, Ayacucho. Her parents were Dámaso Rivas and Modesta Lopez. It was in her family home, in Ayacucho where she, and her ten siblings, learned Christian virtues and internalized the values of justice and solidarity.

In 1942, she entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. On February 8th she made her first profession. From then on, she lived with unwavering fidelity her commitment to the Person and mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd. She fully experienced the charism of mercy in her communal and apostolic life.

From 1970 to 1975 she ministered to our contemplative sisters who experienced Augustina as an excellent and dedicated nurse, and a sisterly support in their community

Later, as she served the young women and girls in her Good Shepherd ministry, she evidenced her ever-present selflessness toward them, along with others who confided in her. Everyone whose lives she touched found her to be simple, happy and full of goodness.

In 1986, she is part of the community of the novitiate. Her testimony of life was an important factor in the formation of young women.

In the final period of her life, Augustina arrived at the mission in Florida – Vicariate of San Ramon. Here she shared her many gifts and gave the greatest testimony to her choice for the poor.

The Congregation had established a program, primarily for women, and focused on young women and women farmers in the local areas – the poorest in the valley. The situation became increasingly very difficult because of the presence of subversive groups in the Valley of Yurinaqui. For the Congregation, this presented a great challenge with two alternatives: leave the flock or remain at constant risk of “giving their life” in following the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The Sisters chose the latter alternative. Aguchita, despite her fragile health, adhered to this choice with total fidelity.

On September 27, 1990, the Good Shepherd finally called Agustina to Himself, as she had the privilege of laying down her life with her flock. She was murdered by the “Sendero Luminoso”, along with six people from the village. We now have a holy martyr. Aguchita lived the Gospel throughout her life. Even now, she still evangelizes with us through the radical power of the Beatitudes. Today, we implore her to help us understand what it means to be creators of justice and peace in Peru as well as throughout the world - more fully grasping the depth of our commitment to “lay down our lives”.

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Memory and Musing: a Personal Reflection

AGUSTINA RIVAS ¡PRESENT!



Twenty five years ago, within the midst of violence and political turmoil in Peru that lasted 20 years, our Good Shepherd communities absorbed the violent death of one of our sisters. Agustina Rivas, known as Auguchita, was assassinated by a brutal terrorist group with a revolutionary, anti-elite ideology. She was killed in her village, Florida, one of 6 villagers killed that day. These 6, killed in September 1990, were among roughly 70,000 victims during 1980 – 2000.¹

Even though I did not know Auguchita and I knew little of Peru at the time, these events became a window to me of international realities such as the injustices of global economy, the irrational and indiscriminate rage of terrorism, and the international bonds within my own religious congregation.

As I recall my own reactions, particular facts stand out which continue as sources for reflection:

Auguchita was 70 years old, not a political activist but a simple minister in a poor jungle area, teaching cooking, making candy, supporting dignity for girls. Is this the lesson, that abiding with the poor is a political act? This was a choice Auguchita made. Shortly before the assassination she was in Lima and was encouraged to stay in the relative comforts of the city while some needed medical procedures were being delayed. She chose to work while she waited; she returned to Florida, knowing the danger in the air.

I learned later that the person who fired the rifle which killed her was 17 year old. This fact remains with me. Her ministry was with young people. Speculatively I wonder “what if” that young man had had someone to teach him candy-making or carpentry skills or some such use of his time, rather than someone having put a rifle in his hand. There is no simple equation that adds up to guilty or innocent; we all are pleading for the mercy of God.

At the time there was a perverse dynamic in the international economic sphere which was a catalyst to the extremes of corrupt government and fanatic terrorism. My own country, a dominant influence, was guiltily complicit in violence all across Latin America. As an “innocent” bystander, I could feel the finger of blame in a personal way. Yet, as I now read about the recent truth and reconciliation process, I see Peruvians, fully aware of international politics, moving toward self-examination of internal issues of national racism and chronic inequality. It is a turning inward to search all the corners of responsibility. This seems a positive gathering of communal energy toward imagining and acting for the kind of society the people would like to create, who they would like to be. It seems entirely apt in our global climate of 2015, that we could all follow example; if we are worried about ecological degradation, campaigns of violence, rampages of racism, it is appropriate to ask one’s self, “what is my part?” and examine one’s

¹*New York Times, August 2003*

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own culture and complicity in order to take steps toward transformation, both personal and political.

At the 10 year anniversary of Aguchita's death I had the opportunity, in Lima, to speak to a sister who had lived with Aguchita at the time of the assassination. A loving and elderly sister herself, she spoke of her own process of moving beyond the trauma. She described a long and very human process. As I recall so clearly her words, "It is not an easy thing to forgive," I understand that her own spiritual growth and reconciliation was not cast in religious platitudes or dismissive denial but in the stark reality of the daily human condition that requires deep and deepening relationship between all of us.

I was in Lima this past year for a short workshop with the Good Shepherd community and mission partners. In various discussions regarding the spiritual journey of justice, there was a n acute and personal awareness of what justice requires. I was surprised to experience how close the pain and suffering of those who had endured past years of violence and repression remain with each one - so many shared a story of grief, a story that was a heartache. These persons are now in ministry, reaching out, in various professional disciplines, compassionately to women in poverty, girls vulnerable to trafficking, families in need of support... I saw clearly in this group of people that violence can indeed, with a good heart, with faith and endurance, with mutual care, be transformed into mercy for others, much in the way God reaches to each of us.

These 25 years later, I see the violence that was Peru's now multiplied and magnified across our globe. If there are memorials for the victims, if there are clamors of sainthood for the martyrs, I pray they be firmly connected to those who are suffering today. May they inspire those in ministries who are enduring terror, violence, fear, and unknown consequences of following the gospel. Good Shepherd sisters and partners are abiding in the bombed villages of Syria, trekking across the earthquake upended villages of Nepal, supporting girls' education in crime ridden districts of Colombia, speaking out for children's rights to corrupt African governments, to name just a few such places. Can we send Auguchita's memory to them as a sign of strength, endurance, and simplicity in ministry? And can we recognize the sainthood within them and within each of us who endure and retain the ability to love in places where, it seems, the world has forgotten how to be human - including those powerful and rich places where "profit" and "progress" demean and mock human dignity? If Auguchita's memory is anything, let it be as a model of a person who "was inspired by the gospel to respond to the needs of her day, both the need that everyone recognized but also the needs that were overlooked by almost everyone else..."²

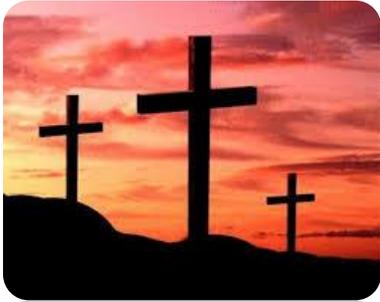
May her memory, following the June 2015 Chapter of the Good Shepherd Congregation, be an energy of the Spirit which supports each one of us as "we risk together for mission."³

² Quotation by Robert Ellsberg in writing on the possible canonization of an America laywoman, Dorothy Day in *the Catholic Worker*, May 2015

³ 30th Congregation Chapter Direction Statement, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, 2015

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¡MARTYRS! PROMESS OF LIFE AND FUTUR*

(PSALM 4)



How many, Lord, have lost faith that all united can turn this land into a habitable place?

How many, Lord, have left on the way his breath and his life?
Utopia seems just that, something unattainable
and not what it is built day by day, creating a future together.

We have dreamed of, we have shown an infinite solidarity...
and now it seems that there is nothing.
But the reality is steadfast as is His mysterious closeness.

Martyrs have not given their blood to disappear in oblivion and despair.

These saints are alive! And they have names and surnames of farmers,
bishops, students, priests, trade unionists, housewives, religious...
Each with a destiny that is a promise of life and future.

You, Lord, have filled them with great love,
that has watered the furrows of our land, fertilizing the soil with their
steadfast courage..

When I close my eyes and remember them, I see a million faces; yet, at the
same time, one only: they in You, and you in them;
And only then, my heart is again renewed with the new wine of faith on the mountain
and I jump for joy as squeezing the grapes of delight,
I feel peace in their company, which is ... Your Presence!



Submitted by Clare Nolan, September 2015

