

THE WEDDING RING

“Jesus said to them, Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” (Matt 26:10)

The second annual Mexican Pastor’s Conference, sponsored by the Way of the Cross Ministries, took place on April 14 - 18, 2009, near Aldama, Mexico. It was well attended. On Friday at noon, 2,200 people went through the lunch line. Others were also there but chose to eat at the small taco stands that traveling vendors erected for the occasion.

All the pastors are invited to come to this conference without paying one peso. Everything is free! They receive, food, lodging, literature, etc. at no cost to them whatsoever. Even busses are chartered to help provide transportation for those who otherwise would be unable to attend. No offerings are received during the conference.

One year ago, however, just before the first conference, a van filled with Christian workers, was hit head on by a car doing over 100 miles per hour. Nine people died! On that occasion our brethren in Mexico disregarded the wishes of their American brethren, and received an offering on their own. Two WOTC workers were killed, and six others were in the hospital at Tampico. They could not be released until their hospital bills were paid. That’s why this offering was so important.

The poverty of our brethren in Mexico is proverbial. This year, for example, one brother confided that he and several others came without even a tooth brush. Another asked for glue that he might try and repair his shoes.

Last year, at the first conference, the attendance was much smaller. There were only about 800 in attendance. Yet, their offering on that occasion amounted to over \$2,000 in U.S. dollars. Symbolic of their sacrifice, was the woman who had nothing else to give but her wedding ring. Ben Butler, the founder of the Way of the Cross Ministry, could not bring himself to sell that ring. After diligent search he found out the woman’s name, and this year returned the ring she had so sacrificially given.

Her generosity reminded me of the widow who gave two mites, or of Mary of Bethany who broke a bottle of perfume and poured it out on Jesus. Such generosity is difficult for most of us to relate to or understand. That’s why Judas, and the other disciples, were critical and considered such generosity as “waste”. Jesus, however, didn’t think it was wasteful at all. In fact, He was so excited by their generosity that He ordained that their stories be included in the Gospel message. Jesus said that the poor widow had given more than anybody (Mk. 12:43). The rich gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, had given all that she had. The perfume, that Judas said was “wasted”, was valued at a year’s wages (Jn. 12:5). Jesus, however, had no words of criticism for Mary, for she had anointed Him for His burial. During the long night of His trials, and hours of agony He spent on the cross, the fragrance of her gift filled His mind and heart with hope. Even His own apostles didn’t understand that He had to die for the sins of mankind, but Mary did understand. During His hours of prayer in Gethsemane the fragrance of her gift was a constant reminder that someone understood. Every time He took a breath of air in Pilate’s judgement hall, or on the cross, the sweet aroma of Mary’s sacrificial gift was there. That’s why He specifically commanded that this story be told throughout the whole world (Matt. 26:13).

Generous offerings have always been described in Scripture as something that were a sweet smelling savor to God. The expression is found 17 times in the book of Leviticus, and in other books of the Bible as well. The offering that Epaphroditus brought to Paul from Philippi, for example, were considered a “fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.” (Phil 4:18).

Please pray for our brethren in Mexico! Like the Macedonians in the First Century they are giving “even beyond their ability” (2 Cor. 8:3). Out of their deep poverty they consider it a privilege to sacrifice what little they have for the cause of Christ. While many of us consider jewelry something to buy to make ourselves more beautiful, at least one woman in the world, has even given her wedding ring, to enhance and beautify the cause of Christ.

