

March 21, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

### Holy Week

Holy Week begins April 9<sup>th</sup> this year. In Latin America it is called *Semana Santa*. The week begins with Palm Sunday when the palm branches are blessed and ends with the celebration of Easter.

No one celebrates Holy Week better than Guatemala. Guatemala is a small country in Central America located just south of Mexico. It is home to almost 16 million people. The name of the country comes from the *Nahuatl* word for, "The place of many trees," used by the soldiers who accompanied Pedro de Alvarado during the Spanish conquest of this land.

In Guatemala, "the land of the eternal spring," there is a city called Antigua. It is a small city in the southern part of the country surrounded by volcanoes. It is renowned for its many Spanish colonial buildings, but it is famous for the largest Holy Week celebration in the world.

I wish it was possible for us to view on television the celebrations that take place there every year. Colorful processions begin on Palm Sunday beginning at the churches where men place on their shoulders a platform filled with colorful flowers and an Images of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother. Some of these platforms are so heavy that they weigh several tons and require 50 to 100 men to carry them.

"The air, filled with the musky mix of flower petals and incense, carries the heaviness of sorrow. Men dressed in purple robes and hoods, carrying floats (*Andas*) with large sculptures of Jesus on their shoulders, step in tune with the somber beat of the marching band." ([Adventure-Life.com/Guatemala](http://Adventure-Life.com/Guatemala))

It is a great honor to carry the *Andas*. Those who are chosen are called *cucuruchas*. For them it is not so much an honor as an opportunity to do penance for their sins. The costume they wear is a traditional Maya costume and the procession they make recreates the entrance Jesus made into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

One of the most spectacular features of Holy Week in Antigua is the *Alfombras*. There is nothing that compares to them. They are so beautiful and elaborate. *Alfombras* is the name the locals give to the carpets that adorns the processional route. Sand is laid first upon the cobblestone streets to level them. This is followed by sawdust of various bright colors: yellow, blue, red, green, purple and black. Pine needles, flowers and other items are also used to create the beautiful *Alfombras*.

During Holy Week (April 9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> of 2017) let us join Christians from around the world in commemorating the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.