

## Seeds and Debris

by  
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Pedro Juarez has his work cut out for him. Last summer, the eager, fifty-three-year-old deacon moved his family to a small town in West Texas at the request of the local bishop. The challenge of Pedro's assignment becomes apparent each time he leaves his house and returns home: his family's new dwelling was last inhabited five years ago by the previous pastor, a priest accused of sexual abuse who, after his arrest, died from the results of a beating in the county jail.

The Catholic community in that town has languished. Until Pedro's recent arrival, the only pastoral service consisted of Sunday Mass celebrated by a visiting priest from a hundred miles away.

I'm passing through the area and Pedro has invited to his house for some refreshment and a visit. He and I sit on the porch staring across the street at the well-kept First Church of Christ.

"I preached at the ecumenical Thanksgiving service last week," Pedro says with a glint in his eye. "In a small town like this, you learn to get along."

The conversation moves from ecumenism to immigration then circles back to the future and the long-term effect of the shortage of priests.

Such discussions usually weigh me down. But on this day, visiting with a deacon on the porch of a rectory that had been vacant for five years, I felt a sense of hope.

"Pedro, you recall that Francis of Assisi was a deacon."

"Yes, of course."

"And you recall what the Lord said to him in a vision?"

Pedro smiled. "My church is in ruins, Francis. Rebuild my church."

"Pedro, God sent you here."

In *The Journal of a Soul*, Pope John XXIII recalled a morning in Istanbul when he was awoken by the sound of fisherman outside his window. "Seeds and debris," he wrote, "that's all that's left of the Kingdom. So work we must, day and night, as do the fishermen on the Bosphorus."

At this point Joe, Pedro's oldest son, joins us on the porch. He is a thoughtful young man who, until recently, labored as a roustabout in the oil fields. A work-related injury has him scheduled for back surgery in a few weeks. As he speaks about employment options, his face clouds with worry. He enjoys outdoor work and is concerned about the limitations the future might hold.

The father discusses the issue with his son. As I listen, I hear an echo of the encouragement I just extended to Pedro and it occurs to me that an essential task of preachers in the future will be to shore up hope in times of uncertainty.

This is what Jesus did at the well for the woman of Samaria. This is what a father does for a son injured at a well in the oil fields of Texas.

It's what all preachers must do. We sink shafts to the aquifer of hope. It's what preaching on the frontier is all about.

