

FATHER GUADALUPE CARNEY

We are commemorating the 40 anniversary of Father James Carney, sj, known as "Padre Guadalupe". On September 16 1983 Padre Guadalupe "disappeared", joining the many hundreds in Honduras who have disappeared. One testimony from a former Honduran military officer of an infamous Battalion-16 has said that after torture Padre Guadalupe and others were taken aboard a helicopter and thrown alive over the jungle area of the Patuca River. No remains were ever found but the American embassy a few years later gave to his family some of his personal items that he was carrying with him at the time. There is no doubt that the decision to assassinate Padre Guadalupe came from the American ambassador John Negroponte.

There is much online if you wish to learn more about Padre Guadalupe, but in short it is obvious that he was not "disappeared" for officiating at too many baptisms or lengthy prayer meetings. In Honduras Padre Guadalupe was sent to work in the north where two American banana corporations ruled as supreme. United and Standard later morphed into Chiquita and much of the bananas in Canada come from Honduras or other Central American countries. Padre Guadalupe was trained as a missionary but he was not prepared for the hardships and misery he witnessed that was inflicted on the poor "campesinos". He became their voice and advocate. He renounced his American citizenship and took on Honduran identity. He was a friend of Melo's father who was a campesino leader and who was the president of a farmer's cooperative when he too was murdered. Melo's father, Pedro, once said to the little boy "If you want to be a priest, be like Guadalupe or forget it!". Melo as a student in Nicaragua knew Guadalupe who was exiled and he was entrusted with Guadalupe's handwritten memoirs now published in English as "To Be a Revolutionary". Then Guadalupe returned clandestinely to Honduras as chaplain to a small revolutionary unit aiming to promote an uprising against the military dictatorship. Obviously that did not go well.

Padre Guadalupe has not been forgotten. A village in the Aguan valley bears his name - "Guadalupe Carney". He stands out as one of those foreign missionaries who got close to the people, close enough as Pope Francis would say "to smell like the sheep". That obviously upset the people in power, yes in the church too! Guadalupe is one of hundreds of priests and church workers assassinated because of their closeness to the people and what has been defined as their "preferential option".

By Phil Little