The Blessing

Children and their parents spilled out the front door of the hospital. Babies nestled on their mothers’ laps, little girls hid behind their daddies’ legs and young boys wrestled. The Mann surgical team nudged their way through the hot and overcrowded waiting room. As is the custom, the patients and the volunteers came together in prayer before the busyness of triage began.

Father Flavio Bravo then took water and blessed the patients and their parents. As he turned to go, a little boy, about 10 years old, pushed through the sea of people as best he could to Father’s side. He stumbled a little, because he was carrying his little brother. He said, “Father, will you please bless my brother?” And, Father Bravo leaned forward to gently bless the little boy, as his big brother held him.

He would have been easy to miss in the throng of people, this boy who carried his brother to Father Bravo for a blessing. But, there was something about him. Not only determination, but a sense of peace uncommon in one so young. He was resolved; his little brother would receive a special blessing before his surgery. But there was also a sense of calm, as if he knew that with the blessing, all would be well.
Later that day, I met Pedro and Jeremias, who are 10 and 7. Although I had assumed that Jeremias was the patient, I learned that the Chenault medical clinic team had sent both brothers for surgery. So, while Pedro would also be receiving a surgery, he somehow had forgotten to ask Father for his own blessing. He asked only that Father Bravo bless his baby brother, Jeremias.

Their mother explained that while Jeremias was 7, he did not speak. It became clear as to why. He was ‘tongue-tied’. A band of tissue literally was tying his tongue to the floor of his mouth, preventing him from speaking. And, he could not eat very well, which explained why he was so small for his age. It also became a little clearer that Pedro, in all likelihood, had been looking out for his little brother as long as he could remember.

On Monday morning, both boys received their hernia repair surgeries and Jeremias received a special blessing: a five minute surgery that released his tongue*.

On Tuesday morning, Jeremias was jumping about, sticking out his tongue at anyone who would look at him. His face was joyous. Pedro on the other hand was taking a little longer to recover and was in his hospital bed watching it unfold.

The Mann surgical team always takes pictures of the children and their families before their surgeries, presenting the framed picture to the family on the day they go home. For many, it is the only picture they have of themselves or of their children. As we stood in the hospital hallway, Neal lovingly presented Jeremias and his mother with the framed photo taken just a few days before. With a beaming smile, Jeremias held the picture tightly and ran into the hospital ward. He wanted to show his big brother the picture of the two of them.

Of course, in the picture, Pedro has his arm around his little brother, Jeremias. His little brother who he had carried to Father Bravo for a special blessing. Little does he know, that for all of us who watched him, it is he, Pedro, who has been the blessing.

Rev. Linda McCarty
President & CEO

*All three surgeries would have been performed in the early months of these boys’ lives, had they been born in the United States. In Guatemala, the need for these types of surgeries for children who are much older is common.