

Dearest Ones,

Greetings from hot and humid Panama!

When Mary's mother passed away in Panama one year ago, we were not able to be here because of the pandemic. Now, exactly one year later, we were able to hold a memorial service at her very home. This took place last Saturday, with several immediate family members attending, all wearing masks, of course. We are starting winter season down here, which means we're experiencing quite a bit of rain pretty much every day (of course, no snow in Panamá).



I made sure to take Mary out to some of her mother's favorite places and relive the special memories.

Going into my mother-in-law's room was very hard for my dear wife. Never had

she ever entered this house she built for her parents so many years ago that her mother was not here to welcome her in. So, we are both sad and glad that we are finally here to close out this chapter in her life and see all my wife's siblings. I had a special time to honor my mother-in-law by leading the program in a meaningful way, knowing full well that these are predominantly Roman Catholics. When somebody passes away in their midst, a great sense of emotional devastation and loss takes place, as they have no sense of hope or peace because there is not ever an assurance attaining salvation. So I shared out of Psalm 116:15 *"Precious in the sight of*

*the Lord is the death of His faithful servants"*. What a great opportunity for conveying that the death of a believer is a great transition to a better place reserved by God Himself. What a wonderful experience to share the concept that through Jesus, one can stand assured of forgiveness of sins!

Of course, we've had very meaningful times, connecting with many of my wife's close and even distant relatives. However, a major concern while we've been here is Sarai's condition with lupus in San Antonio. The very day we flew down to Panama, she was scheduled to start chemo. Of course, when we planned out our trip, we had no idea this would happen. On top of this, she's had some very interesting weather conditions like severe thunderstorms, hail, power outages, etc. Yup, life never seems to be predictable.

Before leaving home, we had to take a COVID test (and have a NEGATIVE result, of course). Now, as we approach our return trip, we have to do this all over again.

So far, God has kept us very safe and sound. We're praying that we are able to return home just the same way we arrived. Sarai's condition will be our highest priority as we land in San Antonio. Depending on her condition, we will decide to stay there at least one day or drive to McAllen right after.

Before closing, we just want to express our profound sense of gratitude for your love and prayers on our behalf.

May the gracious Lord continue to bless you and those you love. May God bless, especially all you mothers on your special day.

Eternally grateful,

*Franc & Mary Ortega*



We are so grateful for making the time to do some much-needed repairs and on Mary's parents' gravesites.

