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God is our Father.'*

I am Jose Lucino Ramirez,

a farm worker, and I have been coming to this area for 25 years. My father was a migrant worker before and my uncle, too.

Thus Ramirez, sitting upright on the edge of his seat, began to share the experiences of his life, sometimes frowning, but more often with a smile breaking through at a reassuring look from his wife.

"Working on the farm is the only thing I know how to do," he explained. "And, I do it well. I work from sunrise to sunset, on hot days and cold days, and when the farmer needs it, on rainy days. I live from the land."

As Ramirez converses in Spanish, one can't help but be impressed with the pride in his words and the philosophy of life imbedded in the lines in his face.

"I have appreciated the land in my life and the land loves me back. In the beginning when I was younger, it was hard — sometimes we arrived at places where nothing was secure. They called us to work and we were not working. Food was scarce and I really don't know how I and my family survived. I can remember the children crying because they needed milk and we could not explain to them why they could not eat. The only thing we could give them was a tear from our eyes and our love. In the times when food was scarce, we had to search for a miracle to feed us. When the miracles came, it was because God is our Father."

There are many patterns of life facing migrant workers. Some travel from camp to camp harvesting crops from Texas to Canada. Ramirez is working in the Penn Yan area where he lives the six month season in a trailer with his wife and seven children. He is from Texas and returns each fall to the home he has built with his own hands.

Ramirez explained that work in Texas is scarce and usually only the father finds work. By coming north, more of the family can earn money in the fields. This is necessary to carry them through the year.

Coming north for them means sorrow, explained his wife, for it means becoming accustomed to another way of life. They have to pack belongings and meet new friends and faces. Relatives and the security of familiar places and traditions are left behind.

"Life is full of questions for us," Mrs. Ramirez said. "What is going to happen? Will there be enough work? Enough rain? Enough crops?"

One of the girls, Adalida, doesn't like to come because she falls behind in her school work and must leave all her friends behind. After a day's work in the fields, everyone is too tired to have much fun. The trailer is in darkness before night falls and everyone is asleep. A new day begins with the light of morning.

The boys earn money for clothes, but there is little to occupy their Sundays. They come with their mother and father because families stick together.

Ramirez and his family have been coming to the same place for six years. He is proud of his hard work — the fruit of his labors is food on his table, sometimes not abundantly, but enough when there is work.

He is complaining lately about the high price of everything, especially dried beans and the flour basic to their fare of beans and tortillas. More and more of the money is taken for food when there are many other needs for a large family. The children's contribution is necessary. When

there is a day of rest, it is a day without wages.

Jose Ramirez stands tall and wears a fierce sense of independence. He would go hungry before asking for help he did not earn with his own hands. His dream is for a small truck to take him wherever he wants to go, just to possess the feeling of freedom — freedom to follow the soil where it calls him to earn a living and a future for his family.

He sees his world changing because people are more interested than before in his way of life. Now there is a day care center and summer school for the youngsters not yet in the fields. Even our church, he says, is more aware of our existence than before and sends a Spanish speaking priest among us. Salaries are more stable, more people are aware of our problems. Still childhood is too short, lean days too many.

There is a long row to hoe and time for the migrant is running out.

A long time ago in the days of his youth, Ramirez recalls, he worked all the jobs on the farm from planting to cropping, but now technology, big machines, are taking away his livelihood.

"And we ask, what will happen to us and our children, but I know somehow our work will be always needed."

Text and Photo
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