



Welcome to the High Plains Preacher, stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

## **Trailblazers**

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

What kind of faith would we have if our religion was based on nothing more than an instruction book? It'd be no more than a list of do's and don'ts. True religion needs more than preachers telling people what to do and what not to do. True religion requires courageous trailblazers. Like Fr. Juan Padilla.

Most of us know about the conquistador, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado and his visit to the Palo Duro Canyon. But do you know the place that Fr. Juan Padilla occupies in that story? This is how the adventure unfolds:

Coronado and his men get lost on the Llano Estacado. The expedition of 1,500 men and thousands of horses, cattle and sheep wander across the vast plains for months, their supplies dwindling when, finally, they come upon the canyon we call Palo Duro. They descend into the canyon to regroup and take cover from the wind.

That night a hailstorm strikes, stampedes the horses and destroys most of their equipment. The next morning, Coronado sends hunters up on the plains to kill buffalo and other game, but the hunters got lost and night falls. Those who remained in the canyon build fires and blow trumpets to help their brothers find their way back to the canyon. Most of them made it.

The next morning, Father Padilla, who would later become the first Christian martyr in the New World, offers a Mass of Thanksgiving for their safe return. The date was May 29, 1541.

On the day Christ ascended into Heaven, He left the disciples, not with a set of instructions but, rather, a map: "You will be my witnesses," he said, "in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the way to the ends of the world."

How has the Holy Spirit guided you on your journey thus far? How has the map of faith influenced the roads that you've taken? The career that you've chosen? The places you've lived? The people you've chosen as friends?

Following a map is more exciting than following instructions. Thanks be to God that the Church gives us great saints—trailblazers!—to point out the way.