



The Machete

What tools do you have at home? When I was just a little kid growing up in south Minneapolis my folks bought a hardware store. Actually, I should say my dad bought the store since it wasn't exactly my mom's dream to leave the secretary job she enjoyed to manage the store while dad was at his day job. Dad loved tools, and having a hardware store was the best way to get them. As a result, our home was well-stocked, the right tool for almost every job indoors or outdoors. In addition to all the tools in our basement workshop, we had quite an assortment out in the garage. There were at least six different kinds of shovels in the garage, aside from all the snow shovels.

Take a quick mental tour of your home and garage and do an inventory of the various tools you have. At the very least, most Minnesota homeowners will have a hammer, screwdriver, and pliers or wrench somewhere in the house, as well as a lawn mower and a snow blower or snow shovels out in the garage. The typical family here in our parish has none of those tools. Of course, there's no need for snow removal equipment when the temperature never drops below 65 degrees. As for the lawnmower, I haven't seen one here. People in our part of the city don't have lawns. But there is one tool pretty much every family here owns, a tool that folks in Minnesota don't have in their garages, and the few who have one are more likely to keep it in the house as a souvenir of a Caribbean vacation. I am speaking of the all-purpose machete.

I was looking for some bamboo for a project, and an elderly lady who lives close to the river told me she knew where we could find some. I headed over to her house. It was quite a location. The cement block walls of her simple house had been painted a few times over the years, faded patches of different colors revealing attempts to brighten things up now and then. The weather-beaten tin roof panels were supported by a combination of metal tubing and branches, extending a bit past the doorway, creating a sort of porch where she was sitting when I arrived. As rustic as her house may be, it was the beauty of the surroundings that caught my attention. The house was perched at the top of a thickly wooded, boulder-strewn bluff overlooking the Caroni River, affording a panoramic view of the river and the lush green lands beyond. "You must be a millionaire," I kidded her, noting that only a millionaire could afford such an amazing lot in the middle of the Twin Cities.

She smiled and, after exchanging greetings, grabbed her machete. Off we went down the footpath to the river, well-worn from her daily trips to draw water. We soon came upon a nice stand of bamboo. She honed the blade of her machete on a nearby boulder and went to work, wielding her machete like a pro.



Do you need to clear some brush, trim bushes, open a coconut, or hack off a bunch of bananas growing in your back yard? Nothing works better than a machete. What about clearing those ever-present weeds growing out of the sidewalk cracks and in street gutters? Grab your machete. Every family has one. It is the multi-use tool of preference here in Venezuela. Do you need firewood for cooking? Grab your machete and head for the woods. Concerned that you might come upon a poisonous snake out there? A machete is what you want at that moment. Were you fortunate to be able to purchase a chicken for your family's dinner? Grab your machete to butcher and dress it. For these and dozens more household tasks, the machete is the tool for the job.

As with my dad, I like tools and brought a small assortment with me in my suitcase when I returned to Venezuela a bit over a year ago. Working on my bike, doing repairs around the house, and working on a few projects, it is great to have the right tool for the job. For most of the tools I don't have, I have been fortunate to find carpenters and other craftsmen in the parish who do and who are willing to lend me their tools. When it comes to a machete, however, there's no problem. Everyone has one, the multi-use tool of Venezuela.

Points to ponder

What tools do you have in your home and garage? Is one of them a machete? In what other ways could you imagine putting a machete to use if it were the only tool you had?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofst dominic.org or 651-368-7324.