

**Sunday, March 18, 2012 – Fourth Sunday of Lent**  
**Prepared by Sr. Helene O’Sullivan, MM, Cambodia**

*2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21*

Today’s Gospel reading is part of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus who came to see him at night. Jesus openly speaks to Nicodemus of God’s love for us. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” I have always been filled with awe at Jesus’ straightforward proclamation that God loved us so much! When I was growing up I don’t think I understood the concept of God condemning the world. Why would God condemn the world – what deed would provoke God’s condemnation? When I grew up and became aware of the global trafficking of women and girls into prostitution and later when I started to work at a shelter for trafficked women and girls in Cambodia I understood the type of deed that would provoke condemnation by God. Trafficking – the modern-day form of slavery – was something that needed to be brought out into the open, condemned and eliminated.

Trafficked girls and young women were brought to our shelter or came on their own after enduring the most horrendous experiences of betrayal, sexual abuse, physical abuse, confinement, verbal and psychological abuse and near starvation to keep them under control and working for the benefit of their traffickers. In my shock and grief over this terrible injustice, I condemned the abuser of these girls – the traffickers, the brothel owners and the “customers” who “purchased” these young girls and women without regard to their human dignity, human rights and their suffering. The stigma these girls endure profoundly affected their chance at marriage and a happy family life. Their lives had been stolen from them by the people who bought and sold them.

But today’s gospel challenges us to be like Jesus and not to condemn this hidden world of trafficking but save it. When I talk to people about the suffering of these victims they are so very willing to help the victims recover and contribute generously to programs designed to assist them. But what about the perpetrators - traffickers, the brothel owners, the pimps and the “customers” who buy and sell these modern-day slaves? Are we responsible for saving them? How do we do it?

When searching for answers to this I got a glimpse of how to do it when I saw the movie “Amazing Grace” on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the end of the African slave trade in England. All the staff of the non-government organizations in Cambodia working with trafficking survivors and advocating to end trafficking gathered to see the movie and took it as an inspiration for our own anti-trafficking movement. In the movie, we saw a small group of committed people meeting in a church basement to lead the struggle against powerful vested interests who made substantial financial gains from slavery. These powerful figures were in government, banking, industry, the landed gentry and ordinary folks. Yet this small and dedicated group persevered and eventually prevailed. Their persistent presentation of the cruel and harsh realities of slavery from the point of view of the slaves raised awareness and changed minds and hearts and paved the way for the legal abolition of slavery. As Margaret Mead, the

anthropologist reflected: “A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

This small, dedicated group “saved” the slaves and the slave traders. The words of the hymn “Amazing Grace” comes to mind in which a former captain of a slave ship speaks of his blindness to the harm he was doing to the slaves he transported on his ship. He recognized that his awakening to the evils of slavery was a grace – his eyes opened:

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.”

Today we must all do our homework to open our eyes to how trafficking works and how deeply intertwined it is with prostitution. Article 6 of the United Nations [1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) uses the same wording as the [1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#), calling on State Parties to “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women” (United Nations 1979). In both Conventions, prostitution is considered inextricably linked to trafficking, which indicates that, until 1979 at least, there was a general consensus in international politics that prostitution and trafficking could not be considered separate issues. Prostitution and trafficking are two sides of the same coin. We cannot abolish trafficking – the modern day form of slavery – until we eliminate prostitution.

We need to become like that small, dedicated group meeting in a church basement and hold a vision as big and bold as theirs – to end this modern-day slavery of trafficking. As Christians, we embrace the conviction that Jesus will be there with us not to condemn but to save us all. We can count on this amazing grace!