

April 6, 2012 – Good Friday
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Isaiah 52:13--53:12; Psalms 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9, John 18:1--19:42

Today's gospel reading invites us to enter into the mystery of suffering and death as the passageway into resurrection and New Life. In these days of Holy Week, we not only remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as historic events but also as illuminations about how we are to live our lives today. We are called to put on the mind and heart of Jesus as we confront the challenges facing us as we struggle to create a world of peace, justice and love. The scriptures describe the passion of Jesus that led up to the crucifixion in detail. We know that today the human rights of prisoners are not always protected; Guantanamo and other prisons around the world are cases in point.

In Jesus a new type of human life was born into the world. In him we learn to relate with God, others, nature and all things with respect and care, fear is overcome and it sets us free. In him we learn how to be compassionate and care for those who are most in need. We who live today in a globalized world are only too aware of the sufferings of people around the world. On the nightly news we see the effects of natural disasters due to climate change, we see the escalation of violence and corruption at all levels of society and examples of the effects of greed, discrimination and injustice. We do not hear much about the good that people are doing. As disciples of Jesus we are a people of hope. We trust in God's promise that the reign of justice, peace and love will be realized as we live our lives in the service of others and for the common good.

In the Isaiah 52:12--53:13 the suffering servant of Yahweh is praised because he/she has learned to endure pain and difficulties with a spirit of faith and trust in God's promise: "Yahweh will go in front of you, and the God of Israel will be your rearguard. See my servant will prosper, he/she will be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights." Christians see in the suffering servant image a vivid description not only the passion and death of Jesus, but also as a vivid description of how millions of the poor, marginalized and excluded are suffering in countries around the world. For Christians the passion and death of Jesus invites us to live a nonviolent life style based of compassion, forgiveness and love. Each of us has a role in creating more just structures in society which alleviate the suffering of others.

We who live and work among the poor in the outskirts of the city of Lima know how difficult it is for all too many to make ends meet. So often the elderly and sick do not get the care and attention they need and deserve. It is common for one person to have a job and have to support five or six members of a family. Young people finishing high school, if they are lucky to get a low paying job, have to work 10 to 12 hours a day not to mention the time traveling. When you travel on the bus there are always people with their sad stories trying to sell things like cookies, candy, peanuts or what ever. Even children get on the bus to entertain the travelers with their music, songs or jokes. You need to keep a little change handy because you know that they would not be doing this type of work if they were not really hard up.

In Psalm 31 we hear a person of faith crying out to God in time of need. Those who are economically poor often find themselves crying out to God as they move from one crisis to another. When we talk to people who are having a hard time, they often give examples of how God has come to their aid in the past and is with them in their day by day struggles. Some examples: Maria was in need of an operation and had no money but she met a social

worker who offered to help her get the operation she needs. Raphael, an old man, told me that he was having difficult seeing and went to the public hospital. The doctor took pity on him and operated on him without charge. It is common for neighbors to look out for others in need. In one of the parish groups a lady told everyone that before coming to the group she use to hit her children to make them behave, but after seeing other parents treat their children with patience and kindness, she changed and now the whole family is happier. She said that it was the grace of God that helped her.

One of the big problems in Peru is the mining situation and the contamination of water due to the use of mercury, cyanide and other heavy metals. The people of Cajamarca in the north of Peru have been trying to protect their environment against this contamination by Yanacocha, one of the largest gold mining companies, in the country. At great sacrifice the people decided to march to Lima in protest and to unite their struggle for clean water with people across the country. This struggle for justice on the part of the people of Cajamarca has helped to raise consciousness regarding the need for water as a basic human right.

In another part of the country in Oroya, Huancayo, another mining company, Doe Run, has been contaminating the water, land and air for years. Bishop Pedro Barreto, S.J. has spoken out about the effects of the contamination of lead and sulfur dioxide on the general population. Last month he and the diocesan team received life threats for being outspoken. Bishop Barreto in response said: “[W]e will continue firm in the defense of life. Nor will we be frightened; we will not stop working to protect the population as part of our mission of evangelization.”

This is a time to renew our commitment to Jesus, who offered his life so that all might live. May we have the courage to follow Him in the way of peace.

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