

July 8, 2012 – 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time
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Ezekiel 2:2-5; Psalm: 123: 1-4; 2nd Corinthians: 12: 7-10; Mark 6: 1-6

Today's readings hold bold challenges for us, as they did for our prophets of long ago. We are called to speak the truth to those who choose not to hear; to be a voice for all who fear for their lives amid unjust social and political systems; to stand up in defense of "right over might" – even if it means our own diminishment. Our Catholic social tradition reminds us that we are interrelated in and through our world with all others, and what affects the lives of our brothers and sisters is our concern.

As we look out upon our world, we ask: "What are some of the present challenges we face as a prophetic, faith community?" First of importance is the current economic crisis that has impacted the lives of millions of people globally, and has added to their suffering and impoverishment. An economic and political model that has been in place for decades prioritized deregulation of world markets, based on the belief that finance-dominated growth built on speculation would create common wealth, and in turn provide better services to people. This belief and the many failed policies inspired by it have left millions without the bare necessities to sustain their very lives. Greed of leading multinationals, corporate policies that favored the wealthy, unscrupulous practices of the many in power all have contributed to the poverty of the voiceless.

Our challenges do not stop with just the economy, but impinge on the well-being and survival of our land and environment. In the past decade, in so many environmental sectors, conditions have either failed to improve or are worsening:

- Health problems are increasing due to pollution caused by heavy metals and other contaminants in the air.
- High population densities and urban development strain half of all coastal ecosystems.
- Over 12 million people each year, mostly in developing countries, are killed by unclean water and poor sanitation.
- Fish populations and ocean fisheries are overexploited and dying out.
- Earth has lost nearly half of its original forest cover; each year another 16 million hectares are cut, bulldozed, or burned.
- Many human activities push thousands of plant and animal species into extinction, threatening Earth's crucial biological diversity
- Greenhouse gas emissions, caused mainly by burning fossil fuels, are warming Earth's surface, leading to the probable rise of sea levels, which will lead to widespread flooding.

These are our economic and environmental challenges, yet countless men and women of faith are embracing these realities, giving meaning to their love for God in service to their brothers and sisters throughout our world. We remember and are inspired by:

- Dorothy Stang, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, worked for nearly 40 years in the Anapu region in Brazil, defending the human rights of the poor, landless and indigenous populations. She helped farmers rebuild their livelihoods, cultivate their land and defend their rights from loggers and ranchers. One day, as she walked her usual path to assist her beloved

people, she was killed by hired gunmen. “Whether they listen or not, they will know they have had a prophet among them.”

- Billy and Kathleen Doerner in Chiang Mai, Thailand have worked tirelessly to gain citizenship for the tribal residents in the mountainous areas in the northern part of the country, accompanying local leaders to the offices of government officials, only to be rebuked time and time again. They remain undaunted for they live in the truth, “My power works best in your weakness.”
- Maryknoll Sister Elsie Monge, born in Ecuador, labors with her people to defend their land against large-scale mining in the highlands where companies from Canada and elsewhere have identified large chunks of land for metal extraction. During demonstrations against these companies, many indigenous have been gassed, detained, beaten and killed. A tactic of the mining companies is to start lawsuits against the leaders of the movement. Elsie’s strategy has been and continues to be to get amnesty from legal actions taken against her people. Success has been seen as 665 civic leaders have been granted amnesty through her appeals and efforts. She says, “My Catholic faith gives me strength in the presence of obstacles and frustrations.”
- Maryknoll Sister Ngoc-Ha Pham has worked with youth in El Salvador for a number of years; she started a “peace library” where youngsters learn to read, to write and to take part in art activities. One day after the inauguration of the library, a corporate phone company came with their workers to install a 30-meter tower across from the library. The community members, aware of the dangers to their health, marched to the site shouting, “We want life – we reject this tower.” Many days and hours of protesting brought down this greedy giant. “I lift up my eyes to you, O Lord, and trust in your help and mercy.”
- The people of Darien, Panama share their origins, spirituality and faith through the care and reverence shown to their land. Accompanying them, Maryknoll sisters teach and learn different organic methods of cultivating the earth. One such method has been the identification, cultivation, processing and commercialization of medicinal plants as an alternative product that farmers could grow and sell. Ecological awareness programs, through summer day camps for children and youth, teach land conversion and reforestation. Promotion of alternative sources of energy, such as the use of solar panel for lighting, collection and storage of rainwater, and use of clay stoves that maintain more heat while using less firewood on family farms, has been one of the most successful programs given. “I look up my eyes to you, O Lord, and am in awe of the bounty of your creation.”

As men and women of faith, we hold this truth that all creation is to be revered, and held sacred in our lives. We are called to speak the truth, to proclaim justice in and out of season, to defend the oppressed, to be witnesses to all to whom we are sent that righteousness is to be upheld at all times, in all situations.

This homily reflection was originally published in 2009.

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