

May 25, 2014 – Sixth Sunday of Easter
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Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Psalms 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20; First Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

On this sixth Sunday of Easter, we listen to the most comforting words of Jesus: "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you," and "I will give you another advocate to be with you always."

Having been a companion with orphaned children and their guardians here in Mwanza Tanzania, I find great consolation to hear these loving words. In Tanzania, children are considered orphaned if they have lost at least one parent. Some of the children in our group have lost both parents and are being taken care of by relatives or guardians; others are raised by their widowed mothers. These orphans and those who care for them are vulnerable families to which the team consisting of a Tanzanian Maryknoll lay affiliate, a Maryknoll lay missionary and myself minister to. Helping these children get primary and secondary education and also helping them spiritually and how to take care of themselves through Capacitar – incorporating justice, peace and integrity of creation activities – are part of our program for them. We also started some income generating projects to the widowed mothers and their guardians to help themselves and their families. At present, we have 70 orphaned children and it gives our team great joy to know that they are not standing alone in fulfilling their right to get education.

With the ever growing poverty here, women are often encouraged to find ways to work together for the betterment of their families through group training and income-generating projects. Sometimes the women and the kids are being helped in times of illness to go to the clinic but oftentimes with their ongoing projects, they are able to buy medicines when the need arises. The women also are able to chip in little amount to help each other in times of illness and death of family members. The famous saying here in Africa, "Mtu ni watu," which means "a person is people," is truly alive. Jesus said he is in the Father and his presence is continually with us through the Holy Spirit. Being with the orphans and their guardians, I feel God is right there in their struggle and we are in it together, a path that is being trod in a common journey embraced with the love of God. I feel that both the women's group who are working together for the common good of the children is never left behind.

Indeed, Jesus' promise of not leaving us orphans is being fulfilled in the lives of our suffering people when we continue to stand up for them when they need it, when we enter fully into the fabric of their lives and listen to their cries. In his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis said, "A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him." Jesus has left the meaning of his life and mission in our hands. The Spirit, the advocate whom Jesus promised to be with us always, is alive through us, through the many people who continually extend their help to those who are poor, through our partners in mission from afar who generously share their resources and who offer their prayers for us and for the people we directly accompany in the mission fields. Wherever we are and whatever situations or difficulties we are facing, we are always encouraged to hold on to Jesus' promise that he will not leave us orphans. God is with us always. Alleluia!

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