

**October 21, 2012 – Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Prepared by Father James Kroeger, MM, Philippines**

*Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45 or 10:42-45*

The young mother's face beamed as she held her week-old baby in her arms. It was clear that this was the joy of her life. The mother's entire world was focused on her newborn. The scene exuded joy, contentment, and fulfillment.

"But why were this twenty-something mother and her beautiful baby sitting in such an awful place?" I wondered as I walked by on my way to the metro station. The highway underpass was crowded, with hundreds of people passing by. The air was thick with dust and pollution from the scores of buses, cars, jeepneys, and trucks clogging the road. This was summertime, and the heat in tropical Manila was intense.

And yet, there they were. The industrious young mother had a small makeshift table where she displayed cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, and a few bananas. Her meager daily income would hardly be sufficient for the two of them. Life had not given her many choices, so she sold her simple wares in the thick of the crowds, pollution, and heat.

"What will become of this little child?" I thought as I stared at the scene before me. "How many days before the baby will be sick, due to breathing this awful air and living in such conditions?" I was sweating in the few seconds it took me to walk through the underpass, but the mother and baby would be there all day! O, poor baby, what future do you have? Loving mother, I admire your sacrifice to earn something for your newborn. May your sweet baby somehow be saved from sickness and premature death!

My journey on the metro to downtown Manila was uncomfortable, even though I sat in an air-conditioned train. And I couldn't hold back my tears. What price the world's little people pay each day. Often even their simple joys are stolen by sickness and death. Life, so bittersweet!

This true experience of mine (narrated in *Once Upon a Time in Asia*: Orbis Books) came to mind as I read the scripture readings for today which seem to have suffering as their context. The reading from Isaiah speaks about the suffering servant who takes the guilt and grief of people upon himself; through his voluntary self-gift and self-sacrifice he justifies many.

The same theme is echoed in the letter to the Hebrews where Jesus is described as able to "sympathize with our weakness," because he endured totally our human condition, "tempted in every way that we are, though without sin." As narrated in the Gospel, he is the Son of Man who "came not to be served, but to serve—and to give his life as a ransom for many." Indeed, this is the Christian God: divine compassion made incarnate, compassion made visible, made flesh for us. A free gift-of-self, totally undeserved and unmerited!

Because Jesus is the compassion of God in person, he becomes totally approachable by those who suffer. In fact, the letter to the Hebrews advises: "Let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need." Such a profound awareness of the depth of the loving compassion of our God should radically transform us. It will also challenge us to reach out to the needy with Jesus' compassion.

Today the Church celebrates World Mission Sunday. A simple description of mission could be: compassion received overflows in compassion shared. When I realize—both in my prayer and daily activities—the depth of God’s love poured out for me, I will reciprocate with the same love for others. What I have received as a free gift, I will readily give as a free gift (cf. Mt. 10:8).

Christian mission has a multitude of faces: building peace, promoting ecology, fostering justice, encouraging reconciliation, respecting human rights, caring for orphans and victims of war. However, at the heart of mission is always the compassion of God, personally experienced and then generously shared.

I have never forgotten my experience of the suffering of that young mother and her newborn. We constantly seek to transform our heart-rending experiences into committed action and compassionate service of those who suffer in our peace-starved world.

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