

## June 15 – 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Prepared by Sam Stanton and Cecilia Espinoza, Maryknoll Lay Missioners*

Exodus 19: 2-6	“You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites.”
Psalms 100: 1-3, 5;	Know that the LORD is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are, God’s well-tended flock.
Romans 5: 6-11	God’s love is proven through the sacrifice of Jesus.
Matthew 9: 36-38, 10: 1-8	Jesus calls his disciples together and sends them out to be “pastors” for the people or “lost sheep” The disciples are instructed to proclaim that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Today’s first reading and the Psalms highlight the moment when the people of Israel assume the fullness of being “the people of God,” “the chosen nation,” after coming to know God in an intimate way through their experience of fleeing Egypt and being tested in the desert. God is the God of all, without distinction but the readings demonstrate the kind of relationship possible when a people totally embrace their relationship with God.

We are invited to share and enjoy this relationship with God and celebrate it with joy. We are called to be a priestly people practicing equality and justice, where all can care for one another while enjoying and caring for the resources available to them. This is God’s desire: that the goods of a society are equally shared by all.

In the second reading, Paul speaks of reconciliation. He does not forget the liberating history of God throughout all centuries but emphasizes the special and salvific action of Jesus’ sacrifice. Acts of violence and hate are identified as the root of all evil. For a truthful and complete liberation, the struggle must be nonviolent and obedient to God’s love for all. Our salvation is not an act of recompense but rather a sign of grace, the profound act of God’s infinite love.

God calls certain people to be prophets – to show the way to others. The situation of the people of Israel wandering in the desert called for “shepherds,” leaders and mentors who know and understand their situation and are deeply oriented in God’s love while recognizing and embracing the covenant. Being aware of this Jesus gathers his 12 disciples. He prays with them and instructs them and prepares them for the mission. He sends them out to proclaim the word and announce the reign of God. These disciples were simple, ordinary people; workers, fishermen and farmers. During the three years of Jesus’ ministry, they were at his side, learning, sharing and preparing for the mission as well.

These readings remind us of our early years as Maryknoll Lay Missioners in the southern and very rural diocese of Linares, Chile. We worked with two Maryknoll priests attending to the pastoral needs of 27 rural communities or chapels. Each chapel would have mass only once a month. To ensure that the church would remain strong in this reality, we identified “disciples” in the various communities; we walked with them and supported them. We spent three days in each community visiting all the homes, breaking bread and drinking tea with people in their homes and calling them to gather in the evening at the small chapel they built with their own hands.

During those three days we got to know members of the community in a much deeper way and we understood their challenges and trials. We were able to identify and support leaders in each community who had the spirit to support others and call them to be “church” to one another. We called them to be more than they thought they could be and we

encouraged them to and break down the barriers in the community that prevented justice and harmony from flourishing. This practice of community building would allow them to face, in a united way, the forces of evil that reigned in Chile in 1985 under the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

There were many examples of these Chilean disciples that we had the privilege to work with and get to know, but we recall in special way a wonderful apostolic woman who recently died. Cupertina Soto lived in the little town of Nirivilo nestled in the hills of the costal chain of mountains. Doña Cupita, as she was affectionately known, was a quiet, unassuming woman. She was born high in the hills and could barely read and write. For many years she was a domestic house worker for one of the wealthier families in the area. Eventually she married and had two children. She and her husband ran a small bed and breakfast type service and café in the community. Cupita embodied goodness, and as the years passed, she grew in the understanding of her faith and service to others. There was never a person in the village or surrounding area that fell sick without a visit from Cupita carrying her famous cazuela (a type of chicken soup) or a piece of tortilla to share.

She didn't understand much of politics but she knew what was happening at that time in Chile was not good and not of God. From the first days of her humble beginnings, she intrinsically knew that God was a God of peace and justice; she also knew that Jesus called her and others to live the gospel message to its fullness.

Through the 17 years of the dictatorship, the Catholic church in Chile was committed to defending the human rights and dignity of all and to preaching about the God of Life. Doña Cupita's faith and commitment led her to make some radical and somewhat dangerous decisions such as opening her house to host two diocesan programs. She housed the participants of rural education programs and the civil education program training people who would participate in the preparations for the plebiscite. Both programs were denounced by the local authorities as subversive, but Cupita was willing to take the risk. These programs helped the community understand in a much deeper way how the rights of every child of God were being destroyed in Chile at that time. They also contributed to organizing peasant farmers.

There is no doubt that Cupita had an innate sense of discipleship. She ministered to others and made the gospel come alive for them. In baptism we are all called to mission, Cupita's response to that call became an inspiration to all who came in contact with her.

Today's gospel clearly defines what is to be expected of leaders as shepherds and as priestly people caring for and ministering to those in the community who are most vulnerable. While some will carry that out in the neighborhood where they were born or where they set up house to raise their family, others will go off to far off lands. From the day we are baptized we are all called to be missionary; to live and promote the messages of nonviolence, justice, respect and peace that are the foundations of the gospel. It is good to remember this call as we choose leaders and as we challenge those in leadership roles to continue shepherding for those "lost sheep" the most vulnerable of God's people.

For a copy of the Maryknoll election guide, "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," [email us](mailto:maryknoll@maryknoll.org), or find the election guide here: [www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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