

July 6 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prepared by Eileen Charlton, Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Musoma, Tanzania

Zechariah 9: 9-10	The Messiah will come, not as a conquering warrior, but riding on an ass – in lowliness and peace.
Psalms 145: 1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14	The LORD supports all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.
Romans 8: 9, 11-13	For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”
Matthew 11: 25-30	Though the scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus' preaching and the significance of his works, the childlike have accepted them. Acceptance depends on God's revelation, but this is granted to those who are open to receive it.

Like most of Scripture, today's readings both challenge and comfort; and they have left us with many more questions than answers.

Every Saturday in five villages outside of Musoma, Tanzania, on the shores of Lake Victoria, a group of primary school-aged AIDS orphans meet with adult facilitators. The group, WATOTO WAPINGE UKIMWI (Children against AIDS), formed by Maryknoll Sister Marion Hughes, serves about 280 children. This weekend, 35 children from three villages met at Mtakuja primary school. Several of the children in this group are also living with AIDS, which they contracted from their mothers at the time of their birth.

Here in the U.S. this weekend, children and their families have been celebrating the Fourth of July weekend. Friday was a day of picnics and parades, fun and fireworks. It was a day for us to remember that our freedom and liberty were purchased at a great price. The United States of America and we, her children, have been richly blessed.

The Church year is in Ordinary Time, but for us, citizens of the United States of America, this is no ordinary time. This is a time of reflection, a time to take stock of who we are as U.S. citizens. It is a time to question whether or not we are living up to the values and virtues of our founding fathers and the women who struggled for an equal place in the political life of our great nation. What can our celebration of our freedom possibly have to do with AIDS orphans in Tanzania? If we are intelligent citizens, it has everything to do with them and other children around the world including our own children here at home.

Once every four years we elect the person who will represent us to the world as our leader. Noah Webster once said: "Whatever makes [people] good Christians makes them good citizens." What does it mean to be a good Christian and a good citizen in this 21st century? Is being a good citizen following blindly without questioning what our leaders are doing and why they are making various decisions? Or does being a good citizen mean taking the role of a prophet like Zechariah in our first reading? A prophet reads the signs of the times and holds leaders and all people accountable to God, to be responsible for the greater good of everyone. A prophet will challenge us to "choose life not death, that you may live." As the book of Deuteronomy states (Chapter 30:15-19): "Here, then, I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God ... loving him and walking in his ways and keeping his commandments...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live." And "life" in this context means all life...not just the rights of the unborn which many of us focus upon, but also other issues of life and death... hunger, healthcare, capital punishment, war, just wages, environmental issues ... the list goes on and on.

In this day and age, we live in a world that is shrinking daily. We can no longer isolate ourselves from our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, like the AIDS orphans in Tanzania. Our challenge today is to ask ourselves: how are we both U.S. citizens and citizens of the greater world community? How do our leaders represent us to the world? Are our policies life-giving in their affect on the most vulnerable people of the world?

Our readings today speak very powerfully of the role of leaders and to our responsibilities. In the first reading the prophet, Zechariah, speaks of the ideal leader: "The warrior's bow shall be banished and he shall proclaim peace to the nations..." A strong leader does everything possible to work through issues with other nations through every peaceful means possible before moving to armed conflict. In armed conflict it is often the innocent children who suffer most. It is easy to retaliate and much more difficult to seek peaceful means to resolve conflicts. What is our role as Catholic citizens in the face of armed conflict especially in this nuclear age?

Psalms 145:10 states, "The Lord supports all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down." Who are those who are bowed down today? Who are the poor ...in our own nation and in the world? (*This can be a powerful moment for the homilist to invite the congregation to respond to this question*) Some answers are: persons without healthcare, people who are HIV positive or living with AIDS, street children, children and young adults stolen from their families for the sex industry, immigrants (documented and undocumented). The Lord supports these marginalized ones who are bowed down. How do we support them, as individuals and as a nation? What questions should we pose to those who are running for political office? One question is: What can our government do to ensure the lowest possible prices for essential medicines both at home and in developing countries?

Verse 13 from our second reading in St. Paul's letter to the Romans is translated "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." A popular translation from the Good News Bible is, "If by the Spirit you put to death your sinful actions, you will live." So often we think of our individual sinful actions, my personal sins, lies, cheating, misconduct, etc. but do we reflect enough upon the social sins of our community and of our nation? As voters do we affirm sinful actions by turning a blind eye when our nation makes decisions on global warming/environmental treaties, or treaties on small arms or landmines? Do we citizens encourage our leaders to respect the World Trade Organization's rules to make generic drugs available worldwide? Imagine the number of children in Tanzania and throughout the world who could live healthier lives and longer lives if generic AIDS drugs were available to them!

"I give praise to you, Father Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike." These words from today's Gospel remind us that we need to become like children again. Like children we should be open to the awe and wonder of the world and full of hope. Children do not see differences as adults do. Children who have not been made frightened by adults are open to new and different experiences. Little children playing with each other in day-care are not aware that their playmates are of a different religion, a different culture, or a different race. They are simply children playing together. Can we become like little children again? Can we be open and full of awe? Can we be full of hope?

"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The footnote to this verse in the African Bible (Biblical Text of the New American Bible) explains that the yoke of the Christian is discipleship. As disciples of Jesus, what are we called to do? As disciples of Jesus we have to ask ourselves: Am I my brothers' and sisters' keeper? Who are my brother and my sister? Who is my neighbor? How do our nation's policies affect our brothers and sisters here in our own great nation and in other parts of the world? As a disciple of Jesus am I a person of hope? Or have I

despaired? John Kennedy, our first Catholic president, challenged us, “Ask not what your country can do for you. Rather, ask what you can do for your country.” We, Catholic voters, should be talking about the issues and challenging our leaders to live those words of President Kennedy. What can we do for our country? We can remind each other that we are one part of the world community, brothers and sisters with the AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

And so I conclude with a beautiful story that Sr. Marion tells about a Tanzanian child named Shabani. “Christmas Day, 2004, my niece, Lisa, died. Following the funeral the family gathered to discuss ways to keep Lisa’s memory alive. Thus was born LISA’S PRIDE, a group of HIV positive children who gather regularly at our house just to play and be children. (They also receive food supplements to improve their protein intake.) Shabani was one of the first members of the group. He was two when he came into my life. He was paralyzed because of a spinal tap gone wrong and his mother was in despair because he is also HIV positive. Her husband had left her to raise four children alone. Shabani is four years old now and not only has he recovered from the paralysis he has also developed into Mr. Charm with the most winning smile! One day when he and his mother came to the house to pick up his eggs, honey and vitamins, he proclaimed that his name was no longer Shabani, but Matumaini. His mother confirmed that he had chosen this new name for himself and was insisting that the family call him Matumaini. What a challenge for me ... a four-year old with a winning smile and a very uncertain future calls us to face the future in hope In Swahili, Matumaini, the name this little boy chose for himself means HOPE.”

For more information:

Our Catholic social tradition holds as sacred the right to life and the dignity of every person, especially the most vulnerable. A new president and congress can ensure that the U.S. shows leadership in the fight against AIDS by providing a robust, comprehensive response to help poor countries. Read more in “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world,” a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the source of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:
Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation
P.O. Box 29132 Washington, D.C. 20017
phone: (202)832-1780 fax: (202)832-5195
ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org