

## July 13, 2008 – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Isaiah 55: 10-11	“For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth ... So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.”
Psalms 65: 10, 11, 12-13, 14	Distant peoples stand in awe of God’s work –watering the earth with rain, supplying grain and bounty.
Romans 8: 18-23	The glory that believers are destined to share with Christ far exceeds the sufferings of the present life. All creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God ... all creation is groaning in labor pains.
Matthew 13: 1-9 or 1-23	Jesus speaks to the people in parables, and speaks of “those who have eyes but cannot see, and ears but cannot hear.”

For many, hearing the words “Sabra” and “Shatila” evokes images of violence. Over two days in September 1982, as many as 1,500 Palestinians including women and children were slaughtered in the refugee camps in Lebanon. Visitors to Beirut can hardly miss seeing Shatila. In contrast to the chic city center near Parliament, Palestinian refugees crowd into the camp of one square kilometer and subsist in poverty and unemployment.

Palestinians’ daily suffering in Lebanon is overshadowed by violence elsewhere in the Middle East, especially in Iraq. Yet, even the number of casualties in Iraq reflects only part of the immense human suffering. The conflict has displaced two million within Iraq while another 2.2 million have fled the country, creating the largest refugee crisis in the Middle East since 1948.

Despite daily news headlines, many seem ignorant of the scale of this human catastrophe. As in today’s Gospel reading, Jesus could be addressing many of us when he speaks of those who have eyes but cannot see, and ears but cannot hear.

Church social teaching challenges us as it addresses this suffering. Pope John XXIII declared that people have the right to move to another country to better provide for themselves and their dependents, and that it is “the duty of state officials to accept immigrants” (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 106). Pope John Paul II denounced the modern refugee crisis – in which war and persecution have unjustly deprived millions of both home and homeland – as “the festering of a wound” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 24).

U.S. and Mexican bishops insisted that “the root causes of migration – poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflicts – must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families.” The bishops acknowledged the right of nations to control their borders, but they said refugees and asylum seekers should be protected (*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, nn. 28, 36, 37).

Isaiah 55 and Psalm 65 offer a beautiful image of God’s wisdom and justice falling like rain and bearing fruit in the world. Just as a gentle rain nurtures soil everywhere, so the universal values expressed in Catholic Social Teaching can also be found in other faith traditions, including Islam.

During a visit to Beirut several years ago, a Shi’a participant in Muslim-Christian dialogue shared his inclusive perspective with me. Ibrahim M.M. Shamseddine (whose

name means “son of truth” or “son of religion”) said, “Lebanese don’t like to speak of minorities, but rather of two large majorities. The Sunni and Shi’a are both part of the large Muslim majority. Lebanese Christians are part of the Arab majority.”

Shamseddine, a self-described secular Muslim leader, also spoke of the importance of the dialogue of life. “Dialogue should be not only at the elite level; it should be at the level of the common people,” he said. He mentioned young Christians and Muslims who had never met a member of the other faith and said, “We have to meet each other to learn how much we are all alike.”

The Muslim leader’s perspective on life speaks to the hope that Paul holds out in his letter to the Romans: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.” St. Irenaeus, a second-century theologian, wrote that “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” God’s kingdom is already present among us, but we must work to make it more visible and alive for all of our suffering brothers and sisters.

It is scandalous that more than two dozen armed struggles are underway daily around the world. The drive for power and domination creates fertile ground for conflict. Yet this is the same rough terrain over which the Sower scatters the seed. Have our hearts become too hardened by daily cares to attend to others’ needs? Have our best intentions to become more caring and generous been choked by the comforts of our way of life?

While the U.S. enjoys relative peace and security, many nations face the daily violence of food insecurity, inadequate housing, unemployment and worse. Iraqi hospitals have become emergency wards as surgeons are inundated with car bomb victims. Classroom attendance at Iraqi universities is at 10 percent following threats against professors and students. Former Maryknoll lay missionary Cathy Breen, who has ministered to Iraqi families both in Baghdad and in Amman (Jordan), describes this hardscrabble existence as “health care of extremity ... education of extremity.”

Noting the challenge of learning Arabic, Cathy once wrote, “On a happier note, the first grade class in a nearby school has accepted me as their newest student. I just hope I can fit into the little chairs.” We might take stock to see how we “fit” into the world ourselves. If we pay close attention we might see and hear the suffering all around us – possibly for the very first time.

Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in Maryknoll’s “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 scourge 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](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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