

November 30 – 1st Sunday of Advent

Prepared by Kathleen Bond, Maryknoll lay missionary, Joao Pessoa, Brazil

- Isaiah 63:16-17, 19 “Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?”
- Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19 The psalmist begs God to tend “the vine,” a metaphor used for the people of Israel.
- First Corinthians 1:3-9 “[God] will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- Mark 13:33-37 “Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming.”

Today’s Gospel challenges us to be ready for the return of our master, the lord of our house. We are warned that we may not be ready. Perhaps we will even be asleep. Mark leaves us with a lingering feeling that we may be in for a big surprise.

After walking with the Brazilian people for more than 10 years as a Maryknoll lay missionary, I believe that the “master” that Mark alludes to can represent the God of Life, the Divine that dwells in all of Creation. This God of Life is present in us and among us so we need to take care in how we treat others, especially the most vulnerable.

Jesus’ message in Mark’s Gospel of “Be watchful! Be careful!” is just as pertinent in today’s world when the pursuit of power and profits marginalizes many people and places in the Global South. We are called to be in right relationships with all our brothers and sisters.

Both nations and individuals need to be “watchful” of actions that harm us and others because these actions harm God. In Brazil’s countryside, the poor are pushed farther into poverty as basic food prices soar when large tracts of land are dedicated to soy crops for bio-fuel. Exacerbated rural poverty will increase migration to overcrowded urban areas. This cycle of destruction leads to more suffering, violence, and hunger in Brazilian coastal capitals that are bursting at the seams. But God is there, present and alive in the many folks who struggle to provide a better life for their families. All of us need to be careful so that we are awake and see the God of Life in them.

One of the women in our Friday morning group in João Pessoa’s Baleado *favela* comes to mind. Angela, a young mother of three boys, struggles to provide the necessities for her family because her husband often squanders his meager earnings on alcohol binges. Because of the financial instability, she took a job at a new shopping mall across the city when her youngest was only nine months old. It took her over an hour to commute on two buses for over an hour; she usually worked from 9 a.m. until midnight with only one day off a week. She recalls that she often went a whole week without seeing her children because they were always sleeping when she arrived home and not yet awake when she left.

After two years, her mother-in-law invited her to work in the cemetery cleaning graves with her. It was the last thing she wanted but she quit her job and went because at least the cemetery was closer to home and they didn’t clean after dark or when it rained. At first she was appalled by the task – she wouldn’t even go into her home

until she took off all her clothes in the back yard and rinsed off upon returning from work.

Six years later she now takes her boys to help her so they are not left home alone watching TV and idle. “You have to make choices,” she shared, “But I won’t be doing this forever. I’ve bought a plot of land and little by little I am constructing my home to free us of the burden of renting. The women’s group also helped boost my self-confidence and I went back to school at night to get my high school degree.”

Angela’s struggle to find a decent job with just pay is the struggle of many in Brazil’s urban centers. An oversupply of unskilled labor, exacerbated by rural-urban migration, keeps wages extremely low and forces workers to stay in exploitative situations because they are so desperate for work.

For more information

Read more 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

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