

April 20, 2008 – Fifth Sunday of Easter
Prepared by Sister Éfu Nyaki, MM, Paraíba, Brazil

Readings and main ideas:

1st reading: Acts 6: 1-7	Selecting from among the community those with the Spirit and wisdom to serve the community's needs
Responsorial psalm: Psalms 33: 1-2, 4-5, 18-19	God loves justice and right; the earth is full of God's kindness. The eyes of God are upon those who hope for God's kindness to deliver them from death and persevere them in spite of famine.
2nd reading: First Peter 2: 4-9	"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Establishing Jesus as the cornerstone and the disciples as those who are chosen, elected to continue the example of his life, death and resurrection.
Gospel: John 14: 1-12	Jesus prepares his disciples for his ascension. "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these..."

While the readings today tell us of how Jesus prepares his disciples, all of us who are the followers of Jesus are invited to listen with our hearts, ears, eyes and all of our senses and be open to the present moment in our world.

Dona Maria Elissi, originally from the rural backlands, is a Brazilian woman who is 58 years old but looks close to 80. She struggled all her life due to the relentless, cyclical droughts of the backlands but lived there in peace.

Around six years ago, though, she and her family lived the worst drought of the century. They witnessed all of their cows, goats, chickens, cats and dog die due to lack of water and food. Finally they decided to move to the provincial capital of João Pessoa, a bustling coastal city with a growing population.

In the city they did not know anyone. They lived for a short time in the garbage dump until they were invited by a friend to live in a slum area known as Beira da Linha (literally meaning on the side of the railroad tracks, pronounced "beara da leenyah"), where two lines of poor little houses hug the tracks alongside a river contaminated with sewage that often floods. During the rainy season the water level of this very polluted river rises up to their little houses. Every hour and a half, extremely loud sirens alert the population of the train's arrival.

Beira da Linha is infested with drug dealing. In the evening, cars of strangers exchange drugs with young people who live in the area. Dona Maria Elisse sits in front of her little house every evening observing everything that goes on in Beira da Linha until gunshots between drug dealers and police pierce the night. She quickly closes her door but can never forget that her husband and son are still out due to work and studies.

She puts both of them in God's hands and in this way life goes on. Dona Maria says sadly that even with all of the critical situations that she experiences in Beira da Linha she still feels better off here than in the backlands with the effects of the droughts.

Many people all over the world live in Dona Maria's situation. Climactic changes are forcing scores of people to live in extreme poverty, which compounds the already gigantic problem of the lack of the economic justice and the continued lack of peace. Peace remains a Utopia for them.

As Jesus prepares himself for his ascension, he invites us to believe in God and also in Him, who is the way, the truth and life. *Those who believe in me also believe in God.* (John 14: 1, 6-7). Believing in God is to live in God's commandment which is the manifestation of Jesus' life.

The readings on this Sunday are reminding us that Jesus has completed his mission and now we are called to follow his example. HOW?

Dona Maria and her family are our neighbors -- how do I express my love to her and her family? There are countless people around the world living in similar circumstances to those of Dona Maria. As a disciple of Jesus what I am called to do? The first reading, the Acts of the Apostles 6: 3-5, points out that selected members among the congregation are full of the spirit and of wisdom and are charged certain tasks: Am I a selected one, full of Spirit and Wisdom? Can I select someone of the same nature? What kind of action that is within my/our capacity at this moment that can be done?

Many things can be done, such as contributing financially to a provide shelters, clothing and food to Dona Maria and the countless others around the world. This is good on one level – as an emergency response.

Remembering that the climatic change, drug trafficking and economic justice will continue being a reality that will continue to affect us all. The major next step is the analysis of the situation in order to eliminate the root causes of the climatic changes, economic injustice, and drug trafficking and dealing. We can all examine our consciences: What's my contribution in this process as an individual, community and/or a nation? What privileges do I have that give me an advantage to do something about these situations? Who can I talk to? Who can I influence in this process in order to bring HOPEFUL CHANGES?

The first reading, Apostles 6: 3, reminds us that we are apostles of Jesus and are selected as ones filled with spirit and wisdom. Apart from our own call can we also select/elect leaders those who are filled with Wisdom and spirit?

"I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." John 14: 12-14

For more information:

Read more about economic justice 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](mailto:maryknoll@maryknoll.org) for a copy, or find the election guide here:

www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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