

May 4, 2008 – Seventh Sunday of Easter
Prepared by Fr. Mike Snyder, MM, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

First reading: Acts 1:12-14	The followers of Jesus devoted themselves with one accord to prayer.
Responsorial psalm: Psalms 27:1, 4, 7-8	“The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom am I afraid.”
Second reading: First Peter 4:13-16	“But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.”
Gospel: John 17:1-11	Through Jesus there is closeness between God and humans.

At the time of Tanzania’s independence, 46 years ago, Dar es Salaam, “Haven of Peace,” had a population of 300,000. Today, as a bustling city it hosts nearly four million. I serve a chaplain to the Catholic students at the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS). This is the national medical university and is situated on the campus of Muhimbili National Hospital, the largest hospital in the country. At MUHAS, 1,600 students are working towards degrees and diplomas in the whole range of health care.

Our readings today emphasize the closeness between God and human beings. Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. But the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, remains among us. In the first reading the apostles and Mary are steadfast in prayer. In the second reading, Peter exhorts us to be faith-filled yet remain based in reality. “Rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.”

Tanzania is among the poorest countries in the world. Services are sparse. As I prepare this reflection for you the electricity has already been cut off. Blackouts are regular prohibiting modern development and here at Muhimbili, safe medical treatment. Due to the large numbers being admitted, patients lie on the floors between beds.

The witness to faith that I see among our students and the sick whom I visit in the wards is humbling. Each day I visit a young burn victim named Eric. Nearly three months ago, a pot of boiling oil fell on him and he was rushed here for treatment. While well on the road to recovery, he still has a way to go. Eric will need skin grafting on his chest. Initially, he was given a bed. But when he started healing they moved him to the floor to make room for someone else with more serious needs. During the day hours Eric sits on other patients’ beds or wanders around the ward because if he remains on the floor people will walk over him. Eric, like so many others here, must say goodbye to the basic right to rest as part of the healing process.

The faith is growing here in Africa south of the Sahara. Of the 1,600 students at the university, 800 are Catholic. Many of these are active in church life. I believe those words of St. Paul have deep meaning and attract so many to the faith: “Rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.” Suffering has certainly enabled my friend Eric to be attuned to this passage. He remains strong in the faith that says Jesus is with him. While sleeping on the floor, Jesus sleeps with him. When wandering around the ward, Jesus wanders with him. And, he is confident that he will heal and carry on with his life with Jesus alive within him.

Our students hail among the intelligentsia of Tanzania. Chosen on the results of national testing they have been given the opportunity to train for the medical profession. The needs are great with just one doctor for every 46,000 Tanzanians. HIV, AIDS, and malaria are major killers. Dedicated medical professionals are desperately needed. But, despite the prestige of the profession and the demand for service, salaries in the medical profession are low and thus the temptation for corruption great.

In so many ways, life in the United States is blessed; we realize it even more whenever we hear of the plight of people in places like Tanzania. But, in other ways, we experience poverty that is much more severe than the poverty suffered by people like Eric. As a consumer society, bent on building a comfortable life, we have been told that this will bring us happiness. But, so often when these goals are achieved, happiness eludes us. Why? Perhaps it is because we have been trained too much to take care of “me,” when we should be taking care of “us.”

Consumerism is creeping into Tanzania too. To help fight the temptation to take care of just “me” we have begun a volunteer program for students and they are responding ready to give their services freely for the sake of others. At Muhimbili Hospital food is provided for patients but it is minimal. So, family members must bring patients food three times per day. On Saturday our students have decided to visit patients in the wards who have no one to care or visit them, no one to bring them food or basic daily necessities. Their goal is simply to spend time with them and to assure them that someone cares about them and they will be ready to assist. I believe it is the Spirit of God that ushers these young people forward for the sake of needy patients. The signs of poverty are everywhere and these medical professionals of tomorrow hope that the Spirit of Jesus alive within them will sustain them throughout their professional lives.

As blessed individuals and as a blessed nation, it is our responsibility to work for the good of all people. This is why God came into the world, took the name of Jesus, lived among us, and when departing left the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. All Christians are called to look upon all people as brothers and sisters and to care for them. This is the secret to achieving happiness as an individual and as a nation.

Today’s Gospel ends with these words from Jesus: “Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are.”

Centuries ago St. Teresa of Avila wrote words that serve us well today: “Christ has no body now on earth but yours. Yours are the hands with which Christ can bless the world. Yours are the eyes with which Christ can shine compassion on a troubled world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet, no eyes on earth but yours.”

Allow the Spirit of God to be alive within you. Heed the call. Be the hands, the feet and the eyes of God on earth. Experience the true meaning of happiness!

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

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