

Sunday, April 27 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Prepared by Marie Dennis, director, Maryknoll Global Concerns office

First Reading: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17	Phillip and then Peter and John preach the good News to the people of Samaria.
Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20	Sing praise – all the earth worships you!
Second Reading: First Peter 3:15-18	Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks for a reason for your hope.
Gospel: John 14:15-21	I will not leave you orphaned – the Spirit of truth will be in you.

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is this one from First Peter Chapter 3:
“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks for a reason for your hope.”

I like this passage because Peter simply *assumes* that those who follow Jesus *will* have hope. It is in fact one of the defining characteristics of the Christian community. We are Resurrection people – we are *hoppers*.

But for the majority of people in our world - those who live face to face with evil and its consequences or with horrendous suffering - this is a very challenging passage. And for those of us who open our eyes and our hearts to the reality of injustice or oppression, or who see with clarity a devastated earth, it also is a very, very challenging passage. Can we – is it possible for us - to give an accounting of our hope?

There *are* signs of hope in our world. They are like very small flowers in a vast field of violence and insecurity. But they are of many different colors and varieties and they are beautiful, each one nourished by the activities of people who believe that another world is possible and who are give their lives to making that a reality.

Not long ago I was at the United Nations for the International Conference on the Role of Civil Society in the Prevention of Armed Conflict. The conference itself was a sign of hope with its impetus to *prevent* armed conflict, not *prepare* for armed conflict or even *negotiate an end* to armed conflict.

One of the most interesting presentations I heard there was in a small workshop where two Nigerians - a Christian pastor and an Imam described their approach to the presence of radical Islamist sects in Nigeria, the Nigerian Taliban they called it. They were adamant that an armed attack against the growing, religiously-driven sect would do more harm than good (like peacebuilding expert John Paul Lederach’s image of “striking a fully ripe dandelion with a golf club”) and honestly believed that they could dismantle the group by building relationships with them (mostly young people) one at a time and slowly disavowing them of their belief that the Koran demanded a holy war against Christians.

In recent years we have experienced a very high level of personal and collective vulnerability and much of the public conversation in the United States has been about our national security or lack thereof. In response we have built higher walls around our houses and our country; we have bought bigger arms for private and public use; and we have posted stronger guards at home and abroad, yet we are increasingly *insecure*.

Despite the sacrifice of thousands of lives in Iraq and Afghanistan and mammoth expenditures on war, far too many in the U.S. and around the world, especially women and children, continue to be insecure. Some live in war zones without access to basics like

housing, health care and education. Others live with the violences of poverty and racism, with little to look forward to besides unemployment, displacement and humiliation.

Perhaps the insights of the two religious leaders from Nigeria and others can help us reframe that conversation.

Theologian Brian Massingale, for example, writes, “*Security in the biblical worldview, is an outcome of pursuing [a] more comprehensive vision of shalom. When shalom is established through the pursuit of justice, then true security is found ... Security is a state of being that flows from the inclusion of all in the bounty of the earth.*”

Unless all people have basic needs met and are protected from harm, we will never be secure. Unless we respect each other as neighbors, though we live on different sides of the street or the city or the world, come from different cultures, or speak different languages, we will never really be secure.

Those seeking election this year should redefine U.S. priorities from national security to *sustainable human and community security* that would guarantee access to food, clean water, healthcare, education and meaningful work for all people everywhere, the right of all women and men to participate in important decisions that affect their lives and a sustainable future for human beings and the Earth. Sustainable security would emphasize international cooperation to build understanding, to prevent or resolve conflict before it becomes violent and to diminish violence where it is already raging.

Our Catholic emphasis on the dignity of human life, *every* human life, and on the need to respect the integrity of creation suggests a way forward. To change our very definition of security will not be easy, but we are Easter people and the Spirit of truth is moving in our world.

Can we give an accounting for our hope? Even in the bleakest of times I think the answer is yes.

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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