

Missionary Commentary

Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings

Sirach 27:4-7
Psalm 92:2-3, 13-16
1 Corinthians 15:54-58
Luke 6:39-45

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

Pilgrims of Hope in the Jungle – Pilgrims of Hope in the World

This Jubilee year calls us to be Pilgrims of Hope, and how greatly our troubled world needs this Hope today. I confess that I, too, feel challenged by this call and often as I hear of what is happening in our country and around the world, I struggle to understand my role at this time. As I pondered this recently, a scene from Brazil came to my mind and I was taken back to it. It was one that I frequently experienced.

The pastor and a parish team, including myself, would arrive to visit the base communities deep in the jungle in the tributaries on the Amazon River. It was always a great joy for the people and for us to reconnect with the many base communities that lined these small rivers. As we entered their simple homes which had a table, a few chairs, perhaps a bench, but plenty of places to hang hammocks, the best chair and the table were always prepared for the pastor. He would gather the community coordinators and the chatting would begin which sometimes was tinted with a bit of local gossip.

As the parish team found their places to sit, I would inconspicuously wander into the kitchen in the back of the house. It was always an open area where the beauty of the jungle could be appreciated. However, my real reason to go there was for a class on the theology of life lived and shared by the women of the household.

They would never say that it was a “class”, but I learned so much from these strong, faith-filled women whose very existence was a daily struggle. They were, and continue to be today, true Pilgrims of Hope, as they live out each day, confronting the problems of their community, their government, their church which doesn’t always correspond to their needs. Amid all these realities, they never lost hope; they were always joyful because God filled their hearts. Almost every conversation ended with the phrase “Se Deus quiser” -if God wishes.

As I watch the news, listen to the commentaries, read the articles, I want to be a Pilgrim of Hope that does not despair, but is confident that God’s love and grace will always sustain us. As Pope Francis wrote, “Hope does not disappoint.” I do not want to be a blind person leading the blind. When my sieve is shaken, I want to see more than just husks. I do not want to despair, because I know that my labor has not been in vain because Jesus is my shepherd. As we approach this deeply challenging season of Lent, may all of us be signs of Hope and Courage as we cry out, “*Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?*”

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Notes on the Reading

First Reading: Sirach 27:4-7

Sirach belongs to the group of Wisdom books from the Hebrew Scriptures and this short passage definitely shows the veracity of this category. Only four verses, but each word is filled with Wisdom. Even though the images come from the culture of the ancient Israelites, they clearly speak to us today.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 92: 2-3,13- 16

Many of the mystics of the Church say that true humility is manifested in sincere thanks. The psalmist expresses this in these words of gratitude, but also reveals that the “just one”, all those who give thanks to God, will remain strong and firm like trees and rocks. We recognize that these images do not refer to our physical bodies, but to our faith that withstands many of life’s storms

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

As the prophet Malachi says, a purification experience is needed to fully live in peace with our God. Hebrews follows this thought. Jesus, the great high priest, suffered to show us the need of suffering so that our conversion can lead us to a greater love.

Gospel : Luke 6:39-45

The art of good counsel is a helpful instrument on our life’s journey of faith as we work for the Lord. Sometimes we give good counsel and sometimes we receive it. But today’s Gospel speaks not of counsel but of criticism that is not constructive because the motivation is not to guide, but to destroy another and exalt oneself. May our counsel always be to build up with love and mercy as our God does to us.

Sister Nancy Schramm lived for 32 years in the Amazon area of Brazil. When she returned, she worked for the Diocese of Joliet as the Director of Formation for missionaries who participated in diocesan short-term mission trips. She is a past President of USCMA and currently serves the faith community of the Sacred Heart in Pembroke Township, Illinois.

Please pray for the missions.

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