

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

COMPASSION: THE HEART OF MISSION



SUNDAY READINGS:

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Psalm 146:7-10

1 Timothy 6:11-16

Luke 16:19-31

Our faith reflection on scripture is often rooted in our personal experiences; this fact proves true again and again. Permit me to begin with a poignant story from my mission experience. I remember noticing that the young mother's face beamed as she held her week-old baby in her arms; clearly this was the joy of her life; her entire world was focused on her newborn.

Disturbing Scene. "But why were this twenty-something mother and her beautiful baby sitting in such an awful place?" I wondered as I walked by on my way to the metro station. The highway underpass was crowded with hundreds of people passing by. The air was thick with dust and pollution from the scores of buses, cars, jeepneys, and trucks clogging the road. It was summertime, and the heat in tropical Manila was intense.

And yet, there they were. The industrious young mother had a small makeshift table where she displayed cigarettes, candy, chewing gum, and a few bananas. Her meager daily income would hardly be sufficient for the two of them. Life had not given her many choices, so she sold her simple wares in the thick of the crowds, pollution, and heat.

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Probing Questions. “What will become of this little child?” I thought as I stared at the scene before me. “How many days before the baby will be sick, due to breathing this awful air and living in such conditions?” I was sweating in the few minutes it took me to walk through the underpass, but the mother and baby would be there all day! I thought: “O, poor baby, what future do you have? Loving mother, I admire your sacrifice to earn something for your newborn. May your sweet baby somehow be saved from sickness and premature death”!

My journey on the metro to downtown Manila was uncomfortable, even though I sat in an air-conditioned train. And I couldn’t hold back my tears. What price the world’s little people pay each day. Often even their simple joys are stolen by sickness and death. Life, so bittersweet!

Relation to Scripture. This true experience of mine came to mind as I read today’s scripture passages which seem to have suffering as their context. The first reading from Amos speaks about how the rich have forgotten “the collapse of Joseph.” The same theme is poignantly described in Jesus’ parable about the rich man and poor Lazarus. Jesus astutely notes that the blind, self-satisfied rich will not be persuaded even “if someone should rise from the dead.”

Conclusion. Because Jesus is the compassion of God in person, he becomes totally approachable by those who suffer. As Pope Francis frequently asserted: Jesus is “mercy made flesh.” A simple description of the heart of all mission could be: compassion received overflows in compassion shared.

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading - Amos 6:1, 4-7: The writings of the eighth century BC prophet Amos are the oldest written prophecies in the Bible. Amos, a shepherd from the south, preached in the northern Kingdom. His preaching was blunt, denouncing the hollow prosperity and luxury of the tribes of Joseph and predicting the coming captivity and exile of the northern tribes.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 146:7-10: This psalm reflects Amos' concern for the underprivileged of society. The prophet praises the one who "secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, [and] sets captive free." Our Lord God "gives sight to the blind, raises up those who were bowed down, [and] protects strangers."

Second Reading - I Timothy 6:11-16: Today's passage incorporates Paul's pastoral advice to the young bishop, Timothy, who was then about thirty-five years old and in charge of the Church at Ephesus. He was converted in his youth by Paul and became his faithful companion and coworker. Paul presents Timothy—and us—several lifelong challenges.

Gospel - Luke 16:19-31: Our Gospel today becomes very clear if we keep in mind a constant theme of Saint Luke: Christ's concern for the poor. Jesus' parable is a striking story of the final "religious inversion" where the poor will become rich, the last will be first, the downtrodden will be rewarded, and the suffering will be rewarded.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published ***Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language*** (Orbis Books) as well as ***Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights*** and ***A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*** (Faith Alive Books).

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