

# Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

## MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

# THE STORY OF DOROTHY



### SUNDAY READINGS:

Zephaniah 2:3;3:12-13

Psalm 146:6-10

I Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12a

### COMMENTARY

On February 12, 2005 I was the regional president for the Conference for Religious in Brazil(CRB). I was attending an encounter sponsored by the CRB when I received a phone call saying that Sr. Dorothy Stang, a sister of Notre Dame of Namur, had been murdered in Anapu in the state of Pará. She had been very active in

organizing and supporting the small farmers who were acquiring plots of land as part of a federal program to help them become self-sustained. However the local cattle ranchers and the multi-national soybean companies, tried to buy out the farmers for the pastureland and planting. When the farmers did not sell their land, they were frequently burned out and even killed, but the local authorities claimed they had no proof of the guilty ones, so no one was brought to justice.

Sr Dorothy lived with the farmers and with her inner strength and deep belief in the rights of the farmers, soon found herself receiving death threats. No one believed that a 73 year-old religious sister, especially an American, would really be killed. In August of 2004, we religious from CRB, at the annual assembly, awarded Sr. Dorothy a special plaque recognizing her courage and support of God's poor. On February 12 the year after, she was dead, murdered by paid gunmen.

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At the trial of the gunmen it was revealed that she told the men, as they pointed their guns at her, that they did not have to carry out this grave deed. But they maintained their stance and Sister Dorothy, who was carrying her Bible, began to recite the Beatitudes. They fired at least five or six times. And Sister died. I was privileged to attend all the trials that followed.



Her strength was the Word of God and at this moment, the Beatitudes. Most of us will not be tested in such a way as Sister, but all the Beatitudes are to be embraced and lived every day of our lives. Saint (not a mistype!) Dorothy is an example to me and I pray that my courage as one of the weak ones will grow as I confront the challenges each day.

Please remember to pray to Sr. Dorothy this Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> and beg her intercession to live the Beatitudes in your life.

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## NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

**First Reading - Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13:** The God of the Hebrew Scriptures spoke to all the nations not only to the Israelites. God also speaks of what is expected of all peoples: seek justice, seek humility. This is why God's word is truly a living word. This is the same behavior that God expects of us today. It is what the psalms exhort and it is echoed in Jesus' words. Let us actively seek justice and live humility.

**Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 146:6-10:** The many deeds of the Lord are proclaimed in this psalm. The people of God are called not to just glorify God because of these deeds, but to pay the highest compliment we can to God by imitating God's wonderful deeds. May all of us discover the courage and wisdom to know what is ours to do.

**Second Reading - I Corinthians 1:26-31:** "Consider your calling..." St. Paul was able to compose such beautiful letters that touched the hearts of the people, because he was convinced of his own weakness and how much he needed the grace of God. Indeed, the weak of this world are called to confound the strong. It is exactly when we feel the weakest that God will work within us if we have faith and seek God's grace.

**Gospel - Matthew 5:1-12a:** The Beatitudes are often seen as the New Commandments proclaimed by Jesus during his famous sermon on the mount. The difference in the format calls our intention. Instead of "Thou shall not...", Jesus says "Blessed are they..." When we live the Beatitudes, we are blessed because we are living justice; we are poor in spirit; we hunger for righteousness. We are living the Kingdom as God desires. Heaven is promised to us for all eternity. That is a reward that encourages us to be faithful and choose the straight and narrow road for the love of God.

Notes and Commentary by Sr. Nancy Schramm, OSF. Sr. Nancy is a past-president of the USCMA and currently serves in a small rural parish. She also serves her religious community on various committees. She is a spiritual director and translates for other groups in Portuguese.

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