

Project Compassion : Week 5 *Tawonga, Malawi*

Tawonga is a ten-year-old girl, with a disability, living in a village in northern Malawi a region plagued by food insecurity and poverty. For most of her life, her parents have struggled to put meals on the table. Tawonga often had to miss school because she was too sick from hunger. The family also faced discrimination in their community due to her disability. Tawonga, whose name means 'thank you', says her community is blessed with many resources, like rivers, fertile soil and hills. However, with dry spells followed by floods, armyworm infestations and crop failures, her parents struggled to make a living. In 2016, Tawonga's parents heard about the A+ program run by Caritas Australia's partner, CADECOM (Catholic Development Commission in Malawi). They learnt irrigation farming and were given fertiliser and high-yield seeds. With these new techniques, their production of crops almost tripled. They now have enough food to eat and access to safer water closer to their home. Her family is benefitting from their ability to earn a reliable income from the sale of their crops. This has enabled Tawonga to continue her education and attend boarding school. The hunger that their family and community once experienced has given way to new life.



When can we not quit?

A Zen monk in Japan wanted to publish the holy books, which at that time were available only in Chinese. The monk began by traveling and collecting donations for this purpose. A few sympathizers would give him a hundred pieces of gold, but most of the time he received only small coins. After ten years, the monk had enough money to begin his task. But then there was a terrible flood in the area, and famine followed. So the monk took the funds he had collected for the books and spent them to save others from starving. Then he began his work of collecting again. Fifteen years later, an epidemic spread over the country. To help his people, the monk again gave away what he had collected. For a third time he started his work and after twenty years his wish was fulfilled—the books were printed. The printing blocks which produced the first edition of the holy books can be seen today in a monastery in Kyoto. The Japanese, however, tell their children that the monk really made three sets of the sutras. And, they explain with great pride, the first two invisible sets surpass even the third. When we feel most discouraged, most fatigued, most alone is precisely the time we must not quit.

Joan Chittister

St Joseph's Catholic Church Rozelle

Fifth Sunday of Lent 29th March 2020

Thoughts on the Gospel

At times, you and I are Lazarus. You and I and the whole of humanity need to be liberated, sometimes from the tombs which we construct for ourselves. At other times we need to be freed from grave situations, deadening experiences brought about by others. At some stage, we will hear the voice of Our Lord. We will be, we are, called by name as was Lazarus: 'Michael, or Mary, emerge from your tomb!' Strangely enough, sometimes it is more comfortable to pretend not to hear that voice. Am I, are you, willing to take the risk of starting life afresh? The second situation in which we can place ourselves in the Gospel story is with those gathered around the tomb. Did you notice that our Lord himself did not set Lazarus completely free? You may think that to be raised from the dead was not a bad start, but it is only the start. Lazarus was still shuffling: bound, constrained, constricted by the past. This is where Our Lord needs assistants. To those gathered around the tomb Jesus issued the command: 'Set him free, unbind him.' It was the collective effort of others which enabled Lazarus to walk, not shuffle, to walk as a liberated son of God. Lord, we believe in you. We will take the step from the situation in which we find ourselves entombed. We will help liberate others already helped by your grace. We are your faithful people moving towards the celebration of your victory over death. We believe that you are the Resurrection and the Life.

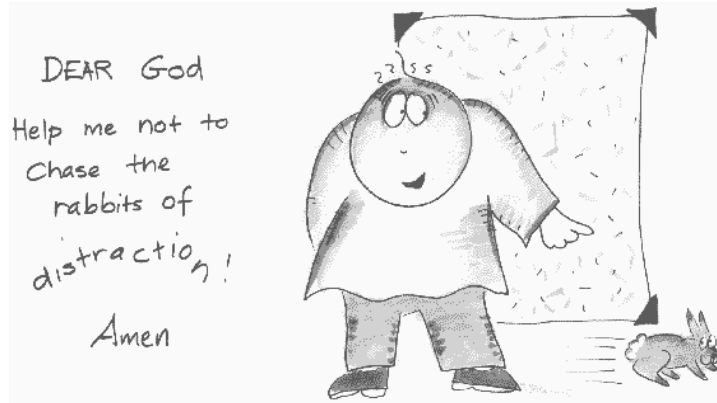
Michael Tate



Hope at All Times

It is central in the biblical tradition that God's love for his people should not be forgotten. It should remain with us in the present. When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love that is not simply a wistful recollection of a bygone past, but a living force that sustains us in the present. Through memory, love transcends the limits of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives.

Henri Nouwen



Feast Days of the Week

Sat 4th Apr

St Isidore of Seville

d. 636

Isidore had two brothers and a sister who became saints but one of them Leander, who was much older than Isidore, took over Isidore's education and used punishment to force him to learn. One day, the young boy couldn't take any more so he ran away. When he finally let the outside world catch his attention, he noticed water dripping on the rock near where he sat. The drops of water that fell repeatedly carried no force and yet he saw that over time, the water drops had worn holes in the rock. Isidore realized that if he kept working at his studies, his seemingly small efforts would eventually pay off in great learning. In a time where it's fashionable to blame the past for our present and future problems, Isidore was able to separate the abusive way he was taught from the joy of learning. He didn't run from learning after he left his brother but embraced education and made it his life's work. Isidore rose above his past to become known as the greatest teacher in Spain.

Jesus Wept

In parts of the world, doctors are being forced to make horrific decisions about who will receive medical care, and who will die, people are getting laid off without warning, facing illness, caring for the infected without adequate protection, watching helplessly as savings drain away, and mourning their dead without the dignity of funerals. But this week, now, I cling to the two words in the Gospel narrative I understand: "Jesus wept." Thank God —Jesus wept. For me, this is the heart of the story as we live through the Covid-19 crisis: that grief takes hold of God and breaks him down. When Jesus weeps, he legitimizes human grief. His brokenness in the face of Mary and Martha's sorrow negates all forms of Christian triumphalism that leave no room for lament. Yes, resurrection is around the corner, but in this story, the promise of joy doesn't cancel out the essential work of grief. When Jesus cries, he assures Mary and Martha, not only that their beloved brother is worth crying for, but also that they are worth crying with. Through his tears, Jesus calls all of us into the holy vocation of empathy, co-suffering, and lamentation. When Jesus weeps, he honours the complexity of our gains and losses, our sorrows and joys. Raising Lazarus would not bring back the past. It would not cancel out the pain of his final illness, the memory of saying goodbye to a life he loved, or the gaping absence his sisters felt when he died. Whatever joys awaited his family in the future would be layered joys, joys stripped of an earlier innocence. Jesus's tears honour the reality of human change: he grieves because things will never be the same again. When Jesus weeps, he respects the necessity of silence, the sanctity of the wordless and the unsayable. Sometimes there is nothing to be said in the face of loss; sometimes tears are our best and most honourable language. We who are religious often rush to words, feeling an urgent need to wrap other people's pain in platitudes, Bible verses, condolences, promises. Through his wordless tears, Jesus cautions us to pause. He shows us that silence, too, is faithful. Sometimes, silence is love. When Jesus weeps, he honours the nuances of faith. He recognizes that all expressions of belief and trust come with emotional baggage. Jesus's face is wet with tears when he prays to God and resurrects his friend. This is what real faith looks like; it embraces rather than vilifies the full spectrum of human psychology. Perhaps Jesus's tears can provoke us in similar ways. What breaks our hearts? What enrages us to the point of breakdown? Can we mobilize those very spaces, even now as the coronavirus changes our world? Can we work for transformation in our places of devastation? During these last weeks of Lent I hope that Jesus's tears can keep us tender, open, humble, generous, and brave.

Debie Thomas