

PRAYER FOCUS FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2015

Compassion for refugees, especially the Rohingya people, displaced from Myanmar (Burma) and stranded stateless at sea.



REFLECTION ONE

'Imagine you had no identity or a place to call home. Your rights to study, work, travel, marry and practice your religion didn't exist – because you belong nowhere. You have no way to prove who you are or where you're from. Wherever you try to find refuge and you're locked up in detention because of who you are.

This is the life of a Rohingya.

A Burmese law passed in 1982 denied the Rohingya people of their citizenship and subsequently, removed their freedom of movement, access to education and services, and allowed arbitrary confiscation of property.'

(Amie Hamling, Amnesty International Australia. 13 August 2014)

It is seen now to be “nothing less than genocide” that the Rohingya people are being tortured, ill-treated and suffering discrimination in Myanmar (Burma). In 2015, to escape this systemic violence and persecution, thousands of Rohingyas have migrated, to Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand in rickety boats. Many thousands are still adrift at sea, waiting for a compassionate response from other countries. It is a carrion call to our compassion when we see simple fishermen from Aceh rescuing and providing for the needs of these people.

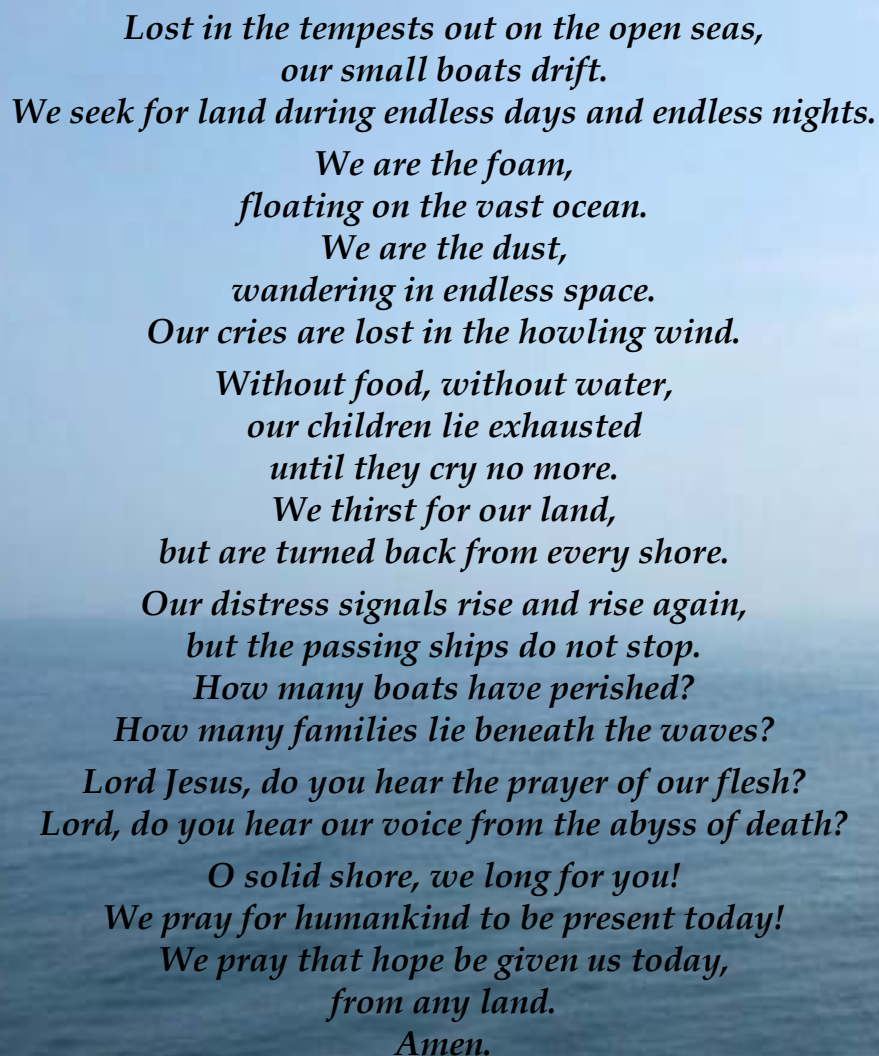
Pope Francis called for our action with these words:

'They are human people, I stress this, who are appealing for solidarity and assistance, who need urgent action but also and above all understanding and kindness. God is good, let us

imitate God. Their condition cannot leave us indifferent. Moreover, as Church we should remember that in tending the wounds of refugees, evacuees and the victims of trafficking, we are putting into practice the commandment of love that Jesus bequeathed to us when he identified with the foreigner, with those who are suffering, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation. May our Christian communities really be places of hospitality, listening and communion! (5/24/13)

As Australians are we going to be like the rich man in the Gospel who continued to eat and drink while Lazarus starved at his gate? Or will we take up the challenge of Jesus with the call “to wash the feet and bathe the wounds of the suffering and to prepare a table for them.” (Pope Francis, March 21, 2015.)

❖ Let us pause, and take these words to our heart.



*Lost in the tempests out on the open seas,
our small boats drift.
We seek for land during endless days and endless nights.
We are the foam,
floating on the vast ocean.
We are the dust,
wandering in endless space.
Our cries are lost in the howling wind.
Without food, without water,
our children lie exhausted
until they cry no more.
We thirst for our land,
but are turned back from every shore.
Our distress signals rise and rise again,
but the passing ships do not stop.
How many boats have perished?
How many families lie beneath the waves?
Lord Jesus, do you hear the prayer of our flesh?
Lord, do you hear our voice from the abyss of death?
O solid shore, we long for you!
We pray for humankind to be present today!
We pray that hope be given us today,
from any land.
Amen.*

(Jesuit Relief Services, Australia)

REFLECTION TWO

'It takes courage to be a refugee:

As people who have faced persecution because of who they are (their race, nationality or membership of a persecuted group) or what they believe (their religion or political opinion), refugees need courage:

- ❖ ***The courage not to deny identity or beliefs in the face of persecution.***
- ❖ ***The courage to leave all that is familiar and step into the unknown in search of peace.***
- ❖ ***The courage to keep going in the face of devastating loss, difficulty and despair.***
- ❖ ***The courage to begin again, to work hard and to maintain hope in an unfamiliar land.'***

(The Refugee Council of Australia 2015.)



Pope Francis urges us:

'I would like to ask you all to see a ray of hope as well in the eyes and hearts of refugees and of those who have been forcibly displaced. A hope that is expressed in expectations for the future, in the desire for friendship, in the wish to participate in the host society also through learning the language, access to employment and the education of children. I admire the courage of those who hope to be able gradually to resume a normal life, waiting for joy and love to return to brighten their existence. We can and must all nourish this hope! (5/24/13)

In the spirit of Jesus:

Let us be people who act with compassion towards all. 'When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' (Matthew 9:36) Jesus reminds us: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.' (Matthew 25:35)

Catherine McAuley challenged us:

'It is better to relieve a hundred impostors – is there be any such – than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty.' (Familiar Instructions, p. 136)

The Refugee Council of Australia also reminds us:

'It takes courage to speak out against injustice: In a world where refugees experience persecution in their countries of origin and often face discrimination, difficulty and rejection in places where they seek refuge, speaking out often requires courage.'

Let us pray that our hearts and the hearts of all Australians will be open to hear the 'cry of the poor' and that our response will truly be one of compassion, courage and justice especially for the Rohingya people.