

PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF APRIL 2017

The Joys and the Hopes, the Grievs and the Anxieties of People of this Age



“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”(GS 1)

With these words, the Second Vatican Council document ‘Gaudium et Spes’ called us to a deeper awareness of the urgent needs of all peoples, especially those who are in any way afflicted. This call was not something ‘extra’ but an integral part of the following of Christ. Fifty years have passed since these words were uttered, but they remain ever challenging today.

Pope Francis in his Lenten Message of 2017 spoke of the story of Lazarus and the rich man, and he linked this story to the griefs and anxieties of the people of our age. “While practically invisible to the rich man, we see and know Lazarus as someone familiar. He becomes a face, and as such, a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast.” Pope Francis continues by saying that “Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ.”

How many people such as Lazarus are in front of us every night in the TV news! Those fleeing war in Syria, the starving in South Sudan and Somalia, the asylum seekers waiting for over one thousand days in Nauru and Manus Island, the homeless in our cities, those denied basic health care in Papua New Guinea,... and the list goes on. Rather than turning away from the image of the suffering poor, let this be our time of prayer for them knowing that as a follower of Christ we are called to listen to the cry of the poor and to respond with compassion and solidarity.

**“This is what God asks of us today. Only this.
To act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God. “ (Micah 6.8)**

During Lent, then, as we remember the 'griefs and anxieties of the people of our age', we are conscious of Jesus' words to us: *"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters, you do unto me."* (Matthew 25. 40)

Let us pray in the words of the Mercy Eucharistic Prayer:

**"On the night before He died for us,
Jesus gave us the great sign of His enduring presence in the world,
the table of welcome and bounty, where all people find a home,
and the broken know the kind word,
the gentle compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows."**

As we move through Lent into the hope of Easter, let us bring to mind the 'joys and hopes' of the people of our times, as 'Gaudium et Spes' encouraged us. It is easy to be weighed down with the 'griefs and anxieties' while forgetting the 'joys and hopes' that are there to give us encouragement in this Easter time.

We remember, for example, the courage of the women and men of Papua New Guinea who walked for seven days and nights in efforts to raise money for cancer treatment and equipment while educating the village people during their 'walk the talk.'

We are encouraged by the welcome given to refugees in rural and regional towns, enabling families to begin a new life with new founded hope in humanity.

We are encouraged by the ever faith-filled prayers of our elderly sisters whose lives mirror the compassionate love of God.

In the sentiments of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, we pray:

**'On my paten, I hold all who will live this day in vitality, the young, the strong, the healthy, the joy-filled; and in my chalice, I hold all that will be crushed and broken today as that vitality draws its life. I offer you on this all-embracing altar everything that is in our world, everything that is rising and everything that is dying, and ask you to bless it.
O God, since I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols and make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer to you all the labours and sufferings of the world.'** Paraphrased by Fr Ron Rolheiser August 10, 2015