PRAYER FOCUS FOR DECEMBER

The Scourge of Ebola

For the month of December our prayer focus is with those suffering from Ebola in West Africa.

Ebola is an infectious disease that was first discovered in 1976 when a Belgian Missionary Sister working in a hospital in Zaire, (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) became very sick.

The symptoms of Ebola are frightening for the people, as the disease spreads rapidly but invisibly by bodily contact. In an African culture, where physical contact with the dead is part of the accepted mourning process, this is particularly dangerous. “The virus’ highly contagious nature means that family members are kept at a great distance from infected loved ones but Liberian families are very affectionate, especially in difficult times, and the inability to show real human kindness is wounding morale”, says Liberian Bishop Anthony Borwah.

REFLECTION ONE

Up till this year, the outbreaks of Ebola had been in isolated rural areas, and fairly contained, but as from March 2014, the disease began to spread in epidemic proportions even though little was done at that stage to contain it, and even now, Australia is very slow to give significant support to countries like Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, more than 5,000 people have died from Ebola and the numbers continue to increase....
• There is an ethical question that must be faced. Is it only when an infectious disease reaches the developed world that notice is taken?
• As a world community, are we placing more value on the life of one person at risk in the developed countries, than on the many thousands dying from this disease in developing countries?

Pope Francis says "I invite you to pray for them (those suffering from Ebola) and for those who so tragically have lost their lives. I hope that the necessary aid of the International Community will not be lacking, to alleviate the sufferings of these brothers and sisters of ours."

Bishop Borwah has a message for the world: “The friends of Jesus Christ—the ‘no-bodies’, the poor, women and the innocents, the caretakers of others—need both the spiritual and material help. They are losing faith, hope and love. They are poorer, hungrier and very desperate. God has not and will not abandon us, so please do not abandon us to the onslaught of Ebola.” His final words: “Please pray for us.” [Time Magazine, Oct 14, 2014]

REFLECTION TWO

We continue to pray for the victims of Ebola, and for those who are caring for them.

Let us remember the example of Catherine McAuley when a similar disaster of cholera occurred in Dublin, with 12,361 known cases and 3,668 deaths in seven months during 1832.

‘Although there were only ten sisters in the newly founded congregation, Catherine offered their services to the Board of Health, and the Mercy Sisters were asked to look after the
Townsend Street Cholera Hospital. Claire Moore remembers that “there were always four sisters at the hospital, from nine in the morning till eight at night, and that Catherine “scarcely left the hospital.” “The sisters often returned home at night, loosening their cinctures on the stairs, and stopping, overcome with sleep.”

We remember, too, the story of Catherine McAuley who, after caring for a woman who died of cholera after just giving birth, “had such compassion on the infant that she bought it home under her shawl and put it to sleep in a little bed in her own cell.” Quoted in “The Path of Mercy.” Mary Sullivan, pp. 116-120.

We are challenged too by the words and actions of Jesus in his many encounters with the sick, “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:14)

“We are losing our humanity in the face of Ebola,” Bishop Borwah of Liberia said, noting that "this disease makes impossible ordinary human kindnesses, such as putting your arm around someone who is crying. As Bishop of my people, I carry within my heart their wounds and pains.”

The Church in Liberia asks the international Church "to pay attention to what is happening here" and the "pain and hurt that the Ebola onslaught is causing families," the Bishop said.

“The Holy Father prays for Ebola stricken people every day,” the Bishop continued. “He is very close to our suffering.” (Quoted in “Time” Magazine, Oct 14, 2014.)

During this month, then, let us continue to pray for all those suffering from Ebola, and those who are caring for them.

Acknowledgements:
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