

THE DEVINE DESIGN OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

A reflection on the sufferings of the innocent brethren behind the bars

“God looked upon all that He had made and indeed, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31), if so how can God create a ‘Criminal’. There is one God who is good and He made everything good (D.A. Carson). At the end of the sixth day, God finished with his work of creation and looking at everything he has made He said ‘all that is created is good’. In this entire creation, from the smallest

subatomic particles to the largest galaxies spinning in space, everything works exactly as he planned. This creation that God majestically called forth into being is good. It is good in its individual parts, and it is good as a whole, as an integrated system. In fact, in this integrative cosmic sense, the text informs us that God declared it to be very good (John Schneider). Earthly parents invests lots of time, money and interests in nurturing their

children and how much more our Heavenly Father, the Creator would invests hope, patience and love on His creation which was found good. God hears the cry of everyone who cries out to Him, especially the innocent blood.

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created”, (Rev 4:11). The entire universe is created to





Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
Chief Editor
Prison Voice Magazine

give glory to God. Every human on earth is created to give honor and glory to God. On our visit to the prisons, through our encounters with the prisoners we come to know many of our brethren behind the bars are innocent ones. Jesus was wrongly accused, similarly today many of our brethren behind the bars who are wrongly accused and continue to suffer behind the bars. An innocent man shouldn't spend another day in prison for something he didn't do is what we think. These innocent brethren behind bars languish in order to give glory to God.

In the life of Jesus, He was accompanied by His parents, disciples and followers in all His walks of life. People flocked to Him as He worked wonders and miracles. There were people at the foot of the Cross together with His Mother as He was dying. There were people to do His burial service. But He felt abandoned once in His lifetime; that was when He was arrested. The arrest of Jesus was a pivotal event in Christianity recorded in the Canonical Gospels. Jesus, a preacher whom Christians believe to be the Son of God, was arrested by the Temple guards of the Sanhedrin in the Garden of Gethsemane. It occurred shortly after the Last Supper (during which Jesus gave his final sermon), and immediately after the kiss of Judas, which is tradition-

ally said to have been an act of betrayal since Judas made a deal with the chief priests to arrest Jesus. The arrest led immediately to his trial before the Sanhedrin, during which they condemned him to death and handed him to Pilate the following morning. He was denied and betrayed. Complete abandonment. All His disciples ran away, the innocent man experiences the rejection and betrayal. The people who were healed by Him and the ones who were fed by Him were not around Him at that point of time in His life. It is the same with the innocent brethren behind the bars. They experience complete abandonment and betrayal by their loved ones. The families, relatives and friends abandon in spite of knowing that they are innocent.

The innocent Blood continues to suffer, "When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves" (Mt 27:24). This continues even today when our innocent brethren are taken to the court for the hearing and they are not heard and many a times rejected. We live in a world where lot of structural injustices takes place. How many of us are courageous to speak the truth. To secure our position we don't stand for the truth and by the truth.

By giving his life to the end, then, Jesus shares the fate of all the innocent victims of inhumanity and in this way ensures that their torment has not been in vain (Letter from Taizé: 2003/6). He carries their suffering within his own relationship with the One he calls "Abba" and, since the Father always hears him, we have the guarantee that this

suffering is not wasted. It brings about the disappearance of the old world order marked by injustice, and the appearance of "new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Far from tolerating even for a single moment the suffering of the innocent, in his beloved Son of God drinks to the dregs that bitter cup with them and, in doing so, transforms it into a cup of blessing for all.

For this reason Saint Paul writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake". The joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering, and this discovery, even if it is most personally shared in by Paul of Tarsus who wrote these words, is at the same time valid for others. The Apostle shares his own experience and rejoices in it because of all those whom it can help - just as it helped him - to understand *the salvific meaning of suffering*. All those who suffer for the sake of Jesus will be rewarded (Ref. *Salvifici Doloris*)

As our vocation is a call from God, let our call to the Prison Ministry become a special call that gives complete fulfillment as we reach out to them with complete willingness. "We love because He first loved us" (John 4:19). Our love for one another is evidence that we are His chosen ones. He has blessed us more than we deserve by calling us to this way of life and so we are called to be unique in our service standing one with the innocent ones behind the bars. If every human being long for love and care, then how much more our innocent ones will be within four walls. Our service and oneness with them should be the reason for many to join the religious life in the coming years. Can we, the chosen ones, be the strength of the weak? Can we be the voice of the voiceless? 