

Homily Notes

These Homily Notes were written by Deacon Bill Hampton from the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Deacon Hampton is a CRS Global Fellow and the Director of Stewardship at St. Matthew's Parish in Tyrone, GA.

First Sunday of Lent: February 26, 2012

In this week's reading from the Book of Genesis, we hear about the great flood and God's covenant with Noah and his descendants. In today's Gospel, we learn that Jesus spends forty days in the desert surrounded by wild beasts and very little water. Water is a recurring theme in the Scriptures, and it is a vital resource in all of our lives. We begin our spiritual journeys bathed in the waters of baptism; we drink water every day to nourish our thirst; and we are sprinkled with water at the end of our lives. Without water we cannot grow food to feed our families. Imagine if we did not have access to this life-giving and renewing resource?

During this Lenten season, let us express thanks for the many blessings in our lives, especially for the gifts of fertile land and life-giving water. We are called to act as good stewards of God's creation and to share His gifts with our brothers and sisters in need. In Madagascar, for example, Catholic Relief Services' gift of a simple treadle pump has made a world of difference for Mr. Robin, for his family and for his entire village. The pump has not only allowed Mr. Robin to grow better quality and larger quantities of food, but it has enabled him to hire two workers to help him tend his farm. In addition, Mr. Robin is now able to sell his fruits and vegetables for a fair and affordable price, which benefits his entire community.

As we pray, fast, learn and give this Lent through CRS' Operation Rice Bowl, let us remember our brothers and sisters around the world who struggle to support their families without access to nutritious food. May we protect our environment and empower families who are in need, and in doing so, recognize the face of Christ in each of our brothers and sisters.

Second Sunday of Lent: March 4, 2012

"And He was transfigured before them" (Matthew 17:2). Each of us has the capacity to build up other people, to show them the love of Christ through our love and our actions. In today's Gospel, we learn that Jesus' transformation took place on Mount Tabor. Our own personal transformations take place during our faith journeys. We are transformed in the moments when we demonstrate love, acceptance and encouragement to our neighbors. During these moments, we are strengthened for our journey just as Jesus was strengthened.

In Hanoi, Vietnam, Catholic Relief Services is providing education to our brothers and sisters in need through the Inclusion of Vietnamese with Disabilities Program. This program transforms the lives of students who have disabilities. Through quality education and the development of work skills, the program seeks to help each student realize his or her full potential.

Each human being is special and is made in the image and likeness of God. Each person has many gifts to offer once they receive the right tools for their journey. Christ's transformation was an affirmation that He had chosen the right path, and helping others to discover their talents and strengths gives them endurance for their own individual journeys. During this Lenten season, as we call to mind God's proclamation that "you are my chosen ones," let us take time to transform one another's lives through our kindness, compassion and love. As we pray, fast, learn and give through CRS' Operation Rice Bowl this Lent, may that journey of transformation begin to flourish.

Third Sunday of Lent: March 11, 2012

“Take these out of here and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace” (John 2:16). In today’s Gospel, Jesus protects the temple by driving out the moneychangers and overturning the market stalls. As Catholics, we have a responsibility to protect the rights of our brothers and sisters around the world. These rights include the right to life, food, shelter and clean water. There are millions of people around the world who do not have access to these essential resources.

Catholic Relief Services supports water and sanitation projects around the world including one in El Pedregal, El Salvador. Maria Idalia Serrano used to spend the majority of her day trudging back and forth between the river, retrieving water for her family. Clean water was not available, so her family had to use unsafe water for drinking, cooking, washing and bathing. When CRS built a well in Maria’s village, the entire community benefited from this innovation. Now Maria can spend more time with her children and teach her neighbors about the importance of utilizing clean water.

Just as Jesus protected the temple from the moneychangers, we too must protect the health and well-being of our world and our neighbors. Clean, fresh water is an essential resource. It seems so simple, but for many, this basic right is out of reach. May our participation in Operation Rice Bowl help to support the vital work of Catholic Relief Services in El Salvador and around the world. And let us pray that the leaders of all governments take the necessary steps to ensure that the dignity and basic rights of all human beings are secured and protected.

Fourth Sunday of Lent: March 18, 2012

“So that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:15). God wants us to live good and just lives. He sent His only Son into the world so that the world might have eternal life through Him. If we truly believe that we are all brothers and sisters and that we are called to live in solidarity, then we must reach out to one another. We must be God’s arms and ears and feet and eyes. We must be Christ to one another.

Our international humanitarian agency, Catholic Relief Services, carries out the work of Christ on behalf of the Catholic Church in the United States. All of our brothers and sisters around the world have a right to work in good conditions and to earn a fair wage. CRS’ microfinance programs promote the rights of workers around the world. The Savings and Internal Lending Community in Mongu, Zambia has helped In’utu Kokla and her husband to earn a living and support their family. This program is managed by the community, and through it, group members can acquire small business loans and loans to assist with doctor’s visits and other emergencies. The program upholds the dignity of work and the rights of workers and supports the local economy.

By standing in solidarity with our neighbors in need through CRS’ Operation Rice Bowl, we are demonstrating God’s gift of eternal life and helping our brothers and sisters live lives of hope, dignity and peace. In our complex and often challenging world, let us always strive to see the face of Christ in one another and be the face of Christ to one another.

Fifth Sunday of Lent: March 25, 2012

The only path to a rich harvest, for ourselves and for the world in which we live, is Jesus’ path of selflessness and self-sacrifice. In this week’s Gospel of John, we learn that “unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24). Likewise, we too must die unto ourselves before we can rise to the newness of life. Each of us must look out for the poorest and the most vulnerable members of our society. We have an obligation to reach out to those who are most in need.

Catholic Relief Services has many programs that help safeguard the littlest ones in our society, who are often the most vulnerable. In a small village in India, 13-year-old Gulsana cares for her younger sister, Shabnam. Because of a lack of vitamins and prenatal care, Shabnam is underdeveloped for her age. When a CRS-trained health worker examined her, she helped the family to understand the importance of good nutrition and supplied them with a nutritious powder to feed to Shabnam.

While many of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations seem very far away, our faith teaches us that no one is too remote or beyond our power to assist. We have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters in need and to take action on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our society. During this Lenten season, as we pray, fast and give alms through CRS’ Operation Rice Bowl, let us remember that our faith extends both our vision and our compassion.