

25th Sunday of the Year

I love a Party. Why? Because one encounters very interesting people. Last year while on holiday in Dublin I was invited to a friend's birthday party. My friend is a local musician so many people at the gathering were connected to the music world. I met a very interesting man there named Joshua, a craftsman, who was an artist and maker of violins. He told me something very profound- that the best wood for making violins came from the north side of the tree, because the north side of the tree is always seasoned and weather beaten by a biting cold north wind. That severe seasoning gives a special, beautiful and poignant sound that no other part of the tree can give.

I mention this today: because it works that way for us too.

So often its hardship, tragedy and difficult times that lead us to produce surprising, delightful and amazing works.

This is evident in all walks of life: in the arts, in family and in our local communities

Handel, for example, was poverty stricken and entirely paralyzed in his right side, he lived in constant agony all his life, yet one ordinary day he sat down to compose the timeless Messiah and the Halleluiah chorus. Each solitary note arising from a place of pain.

Yes, when the sudden and unexpected cold north wind blows in on us.

When sleep will not come the whole night through.

When we are weary and feel we can't go on

When heartbreak and anguish, overwhelm and knock us down.

Whom do we turn to? God. Our strength, our hope to persevere comes from our God and nowhere else.

It comes from Jesus Christ our God with skin on who marks us deeply with the hope. The one who knows our human limitations and flaws. The One who can redeem the pain and transform it into something positive.

A God that waits patiently for the seeker, the searcher and the lost and even for those who are incapable of asking for help.

This is the God who whispers: *I am glad you're here.* The one, who understands, accepts and wishes nothing but the best for us.

I believe this in my heart of hearts because of the impact that the African people had on me

I remember well arriving in Kenya believing I would be overwhelmed by despair.

I was pleasantly surprised-even though burdened with savage and brutal poverty the people remained unbowed: all I witnessed was gracious hospitality, resilience and strength.

Their response to misery was not despair but a quiet compassion.

The immediate work of a missionary is to stand with his people and relieve human suffering.

This is only possible by learning the local language, the culture, customs and traditions of the people. Only then can one understand and create relationship.

Our first task was to set up local feeding programs in the villages. Because God can only come to the hungry in a piece of bread.

Other projects followed: health, education and faith development.

Close to my heart: Our center for special needs children...

African people were also wonderful teachers

1 They made me aware that church is about the uninvited. That when we say - here comes the church: it means everybody. A community of vulnerability.

2 That it is those in our lives that we find hardest to love, that need our love more.

3 That we invest our energy in seeking solutions not in blaming others

4 That God is always faithful to his promise. Regardless of what is going on in our lives ,how ever rough the road may be, whatever adversity we are faced with – there is always a way through: there is always hope

4 They though me how to celebrate life

Like the seasoned and weather-beaten wood of the violin, the African people held on to hope with a firm grip – never allowing the biting pain of life's cold north wind break their spirit. They learned the grace of acceptance, sacrifice and perseverance, though fractured and bruised they remained unbroken. Why?

In their heart of hearts they believed *-nothing can separate us from the love of God.* That without God, what is there? This is humanity at its best! This is a faith with muscle that raises the spirit and helps us recognize: *that Gods love is stronger than anything in its way. Amen!*

Fr Donie O'Connor, MHM

Prayer to our Blessed Mother - for people of a certain age!

**Take my hand Blessed Mother
hold me firmly lest I fall.
I am nervous when I'm walking
and to thee I humbly call.
Guide me over every crossing;
Watch me when I'm on the stairs;
Let me know you are beside me;
Listen to my heartfelt prayers.
Bring me to my destination
safely every single day.
Help me with each undertaking
as the hours tick away.
And when evening falls upon me
and I fear to be alone
take my hand O Blessed Mother
once again and walk me home. Amen!**