

Share Lent Reflection 2015 March 22, 9:30 Mass

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus sowed love for us through his own dying and rising that we may follow him in our journey of sharing with each other. The great mystery of Christian life is that like seeds our sacrifices are not in vain, but rather lead to new life.

This Solidarity Sunday for the work of Development and Peace calls us to give of our seeds of love through our contributions for its work. We sow seeds of justice with families and communities who suffer as a result of conflicts, natural disasters and unfair economic and political structures throughout our world. Solidarity Sunday invites us like Jesus to meet the fallen seed among us, those broken by injustice, war, poverty, disease and to bring new life through the support of Development and Peace and their partner agencies.

Development and Peace is honoured to support courageous women and men in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East who make sacrifices each day, sometimes their own lives. We offer our support so that their families, loved ones and communities can live another day.

Imagine being born blind and growing up in rural Sierra Leone! People with the slightest physical disability are stigmatized and marginalized. They never know from where their next meal will come. Komba, born blind in the diamond mine region of Kono Sierra Leone some 40 years ago struggled on the dusty streets with others who were blind. .Could he find food to fill an empty belly? App March 15

Komba shares his story. “Begging is an excruciating exercise that also demeans your dignity. Sometimes, we would spend the whole day begging without getting anything. But that would not stop us from going back the next day to beg because that was the only option we had.”

In 2008 his situation changed. “Through the local Network Movement for Justice and Development, a Development and Peace Partner, we were rescued,” says Komba.

Although the street beggars were blind, their talents and self-worth was recognized by the agency. They were encouraged to form a group now called Handicap Empowerment for Livelihoods Promotion. Training was provided for 11 people who were blind. They now are able to support themselves and to eat without begging. They are trained master weavers, tie-dyers and soap makers who can teach others and provide for their families.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. While there has been progress in reducing hunger in the world, more than 800 million people still go without the daily food they need. The sacrifices we make here, today, on behalf of the poor will bear fruit through the work of Development and Peace partners.

Take, for example, the widows of Tacloban in the Philippines. In losing their husbands to the great typhoon, they found each other. With the help of our local partner, Urban Poor Associates, they formed the Yolanda Survivors' Women's Association. The first thing they did together was plant a communal garden to grow food for their children. By supporting each other, and thanks to your generous solidarity, they are no longer hungry.

Fighting hunger is not only a matter of helping after disasters but also getting to the root causes of the problem. Poor farmers should be able to support themselves and their communities through their own efforts on their own land. But many are lured away to work on large plantations for meagre wages. Too many find themselves working in slave-like conditions on plantations for literally nothing.

Maria de Silva of Brazil worked tirelessly with Brazil's Pastoral Commission to help farmers help avoid the trap of slavery. "I am in love with the land," she says, "I love to plant, nurture and harvest!" Maria helps form farming cooperatives so that people can access the land and resources they need to feed their families and communities.

For those of us raised on farms and those who are gardeners the sacred nature of seeds is so important. The ritual of protecting seeds and keeping seeds for the next year's planting is a memory my parents shared with me. Seeds are not a commodity to be controlled and used at the pleasure of multinationals. (D&P App Mar2) They are to be cherished and shared with our neighbor. Development and Peace supports programs for farmers, many who are women, in the developing world who wish to plant, nurture and harvest crops to support their families.

In today's readings, the prophet Jeremiah says "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts." Our approach to development is not found in textbooks but is written on our very hearts. It recognizes that people are not objects to be developed, but subjects who are called to take control of their own lives and their own development. The gifts of Canadian Catholics like ourselves – our sacrifices – allow that to happen. They allow us all to become not patrons of the poor, but their partners in the search for human dignity. In this way we can truly become, as Pope Francis calls us to be, a church that is both poor and for the poor.

In the words of Henri Nouwen, by "investing yourself through the resources God has given you, your energy, your prayers and your money, you stand in solidarity with one human family for a world that is in balance and free of poverty. This is our call to social justice." App Feb. 20

Today, on Solidarity Sunday, Catholics across Canada are showing their solidarity with those in our human family who need it most. We do this by giving generously – sacrificially – to Development and Peace. We ask that you choose how best to support Development and Peace for you. It may be a onetime donation in the envelopes for D and P, an online monthly donation, the purchase of fair trade coffee at the back or the gift of your almsgiving through the Lenten D and P calendar. That is the seed being sown.

And we need rain to nourish that seed. For all of us prayer for the work of Development and Peace is like the rain to help the seed to grow .Let us continue to pray for those who partner with us and for D and P.

I believe that we here today have “Sow Much Love... to Give.” On behalf of all those who benefit year after year from your generosity, and with whom we are all on a journey to a better world, thank you .

Helena Robb