

## Reflection for Solidarity Sunday March 17-18, 2018

- Today's Gospel about the grain of wheat got me thinking about some CD's I've been listening to from a 2010 conference given by the Centre for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. One of the presenters was Jim Finley, a contemplative teacher and writer, and a retired clinical psychologist. Jim spent his early years living as a cloistered monk at the Trappist monastery of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, where the world-renowned monk and author, Thomas Merton, was his spiritual director.
- Jim is a very funny man and in one of his talks he raised the question, "What if birth were optional?" He went on to recount a possible conversation that takes place between you and God the day before you are due to be born. It goes something like this: God says, "Well, tomorrow's the big day" and you say "Really - so soon? I don't think I'm ready. Anyway, I kind of like it here." God says "And I have to tell you, you won't like it. And what's more, you'll be upside down." "What? No, not that. I don't think I can do it." And God says, "Well it's an option."
- When you think about it, who **would** do it? You're in this nice warm place, all your needs are met, you don't know what's out there on the other side and the Creator of the

Universe tells you, you won't like this whole birth thing. Setting aside the logistical implications for your mother, why would you?

- Similarly, with the grain of wheat in today's Gospel. What if it was quite happy being a grain of wheat. Why would it want its nice protective outer shell to crack open? Why would it want to sacrifice its life so some other unknown entity could sprout forth and get all the glory?
- But you and I **were** born and the grain of wheat **did** die because an inner force compelled us. We had no choice about leaving what we were used to – our place of security, our comfort zone - and were propelled to take a leap into the unknown; to change our lives.
- That makes me think of all the changemakers in the world today. Those members of our human family who move beyond their fear and reticence to take a risk for something better even if the outcome is unknown. They, like Jesus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, no doubt faced fear, distress and anguish and probably wished and prayed that there was another way.
- Because today is Solidarity Sunday – the Sunday reserved for the national collection for the work of Development and Peace – it **especially** makes **me**, as a member of Development and Peace, think of the many partner groups in the Global South that Development and Peace works

with. Many of them take risks, leave their homes – their comfort zone – and make sacrifices because they are compelled by a larger force: by the thirst for peace after years of turmoil; the need for justice when faced with mistreatment by more powerful actors; hope for a better future for their children; respect for nature upon which they are dependent for their livelihoods.

- I'm thinking for example of a small NGO in Lebanon called the Adyan Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management. Living in a region strife with religious, ethnic and political tensions, and wounded from past and current wars, Adyan is trying to break down cultural and religious barriers by bringing Christian and Muslim youth together during Lent to meet, share in each other's spiritual practices and get to know someone from another faith groups, perhaps for the very first time.
- I'm thinking of SERAC, the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre, a long-time Development and Peace partner in Lagos, Nigeria. SERAC works with poor and marginalized people who have been forcibly evicted from their homes for the sake of gentrification. The Center helps them peacefully resist, through dialogue, this violation of their rights.
- These are the types of partnerships that Development and Peace has fostered over the course of 50 years. These are

the actions that your contributions and donations to Development and Peace have enabled.

- And because Development and Peace is also Caritas Canada, it is able to respond quickly when a disaster such as an earthquake, drought, flood, typhoon or hurricane strikes. For people in the Global South who experience these events, the notion of security and comfort has become meaningless. Often in the blink of an eye, they are forced to die to their old lives and try and rebuild a new one. Your contributions to Development and Peace allow humanitarian relief funds to reach them through the international Caritas network so that they can start over.
- I'm also thinking of you here at St. Joe's. A couple of weeks ago, many of you signed our action cards asking the federal government to direct more funds to women's organizations working for peace. Some of you are used to taking these kinds of actions and have signed action cards and petitions in the past. You might have attended rallies and marches, for example, to support action on climate change. But for some of you it may have been the first time you put your name to something like this. You too were stepping outside your comfort zone and taking a risk. Perhaps you heard something that resonated with you, that compelled you towards action. You felt that inner force.

- Your contributions to Development and Peace today help to provide our partners in the Global South with the concrete means to work for justice and peace and to effect change in their communities. But just as important, your support also offers encouragement and hope because they know that their brothers and sisters in Canada are with them.