



January 24, 2010
Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” Luke 4:18

Dear friends;

On November 1, 1755, (the feast of All Saints), an enormous earthquake followed by a tsunami struck the city of Lisbon in Portugal. The earthquake destroyed the city and killed between 10,000 and 60,000 people. It was one of the most destructive earthquakes in history. It had a major impact on the religious and intellectual thought, and European culture.

Catholics said it was God’s wrath invited by the sinfulness of the people of Portugal and the presence of some Protestants and Jesuits. Protestants blamed the Portuguese for being Catholic and therefore were being punished by God.

The French philosopher Voltaire became convinced that there existed no benign deity who would bless the good and punish the wicked. Voltaire thought there was no reason to be optimistic for some “far greater good”. Voltaire argues that an all-powerful good God would have prevented the innocent from suffering along with the wicked. With thinkers like Voltaire God becomes aloof and unconcerned.

We are all painfully aware of the terrible earthquake that has leveled the city of Port-au-Prince in Haiti. A country that has known much suffering is now even brought lower. As in the great earthquake of Lisbon we have our own contemporary interpreters. The Rev. Pat Robertson has stated that the earthquake happened because the Haitian people “made a pact with the devil.” This is a mean spirited and evil analysis. It is far from the message and meaning of Jesus.

Our world is broken for whatever reason. Terrible things happen—earthquakes, fires, and floods. Much of the world’s brokenness is added to by human ignorance, greed, hatred and violence. But are these evils the final word? What are we going to do about it?

Are we to beat people down with our superior theology? In this way we can excuse ourselves from doing something. Or do we embrace the pattern of Jesus who said he comes to “proclaim good news to the poor.” The Jesus in Luke identifies with the poor and the outcast. Rather than distance himself from the victims of disaster or poverty by condemnations, Jesus stands in solidarity with them. In the cross Jesus embraces willingly our and the world’s brokenness.

We are called to embrace the broken and embrace it with love. There is a horrible senselessness to natural disasters that is hard to comprehend, but to find easy answers, stupid explanations and blame others only adds to the horror. We like Jesus have been anointed to bring hope to our world.

I am grateful to all of you who so generously responded to the needs of the Haitian people in the second collection this past week. Like Jesus let us continue to stand in solidarity with the poor of our world. Let us be healing balm and a word of hope.

Peace,

Fr Ron