

# GOD IN EXILE

Towards a shared spirituality with refugees



Jesuit Refugee Service



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Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and plead the cause of refugees and forcibly displaced people. Set up by the Society of Jesus in 1980 and now at work in over 50 countries, the priority of JRS is to accompany refugees whose needs are more urgent or forgotten.

© Jesuit Refugee Service, October 2005  
ISBN: 88-88126-02-3

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# FOREWARD

*God in Exile: Towards a Shared Spirituality with Refugees* is intended for people involved in the mission of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and others who serve refugees and people on the move. It is the fruit of endeavours to meet a felt need in JRS, that of giving expression to the rich spirituality underlying the journey in exile and the specific JRS response.

To this end, we have sought to combine experience and reflection by sharing the insights of lay people, priests and religious who have belonged to JRS over the years, both refugees themselves and others who chose to accompany them in their exile.

We provide our readers with a background of the JRS mandate and Ignatian spirituality as well as with the tools of guided biblical meditation and Ignatian discernment. The book draws on and develops previous reflections made within JRS, especially those compiled in *Everybody's Challenge: Essential Documents of Jesuit Refugee Service 1980-2000* (Rome, 2000).

The introduction by Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus is followed by a biblical perspective of exile, to root our reflections in the heart of our tradition.

The main part of the book (chapters 2, 3, 4) is a compilation of contributions divided according to the pillars of the mission of JRS: to accompany and serve refugees and to defend their rights. For each of these three pillars we offer reflections by refugees and JRS workers; a biblical contemplation as an invitation to prayer; and an article which draws on the principles of Ignatian spirituality.

To make the book more user-friendly, each contribution is marked by a symbol denoting whether it is:

-  a reflection written by a refugee;
-  a reflection written by a JRS worker;
-  a biblical contemplation;
-  a reflection on Ignatian spirituality.

Chapter 5 presents a synthesis on Ignatian spirituality in a refugee context. It draws on experiences of the four successive Jesuit international directors of JRS since 1980: Michael Campbell-Johnston, Dieter Scholz, Mark Raper, and Lluís Magriñà.

The book also includes a double appendix: inspiration drawn from Ignatius of Loyola's life for people on the move and a glossary of relevant Ignatian terms.

French and Spanish translations of the material are available in a CD distributed with this book. The CD also features the autobiography of St Ignatius in English, French and Spanish; the above-mentioned JRS publication *Everybody's Challenge* in English; *Preparing for Easter*, scriptural reflections for Lent from JRS Europe workers (1999) in English, and other Lenten reflections and prayers in English and Spanish.

We hope this book will bring about insight and spiritual growth in the journey of refugees and displaced people and those who accompany them.

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Don Doll SJ/JRS



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# INTRODUCTION

*To accompany refugees is to affirm that God is present in human history, even its most tragic episodes. In companionship with Jesus Christ and serving his mission in the midst of refugees, JRS can be an effective sign of God's love and reconciliation.*

JRS Charter

As JRS celebrates 25 years of existence, it is a good time for all of us who are somehow or other involved, to explore ways of improving the service we offer to refugees and other displaced people across the world.

Firstly, 25 years is a good moment to thank the Lord for all that has been done. Much has been achieved in a relatively short time and today we can say that even in worldly terms, JRS is a 'success'; its services enjoy widespread credibility and are ever in demand. Since its humble beginnings in Asia Pacific, JRS is now present in more than 57 countries spread across 10 regions, and still it is available to go elsewhere should the need arise.

The development of JRS parallels an explosive growth in the size of the world's displaced population as millions of people are uprooted from their homes. Population flows are no longer a sporadic phenomenon in response to occasional manmade or natural catastrophes; they are fast becoming – indeed perhaps they have already become – part of global structures, they are a feature of the world as we know it today.

Since JRS was set up, the profile and needs of the world's displaced people have undergone several changes. There is no typical refugee, just as there is no classic, formulated response. JRS workers implement a vast range of services depending on the needs of those they serve and on prevalent circumstances. Underpinning these diverse efforts and uniting them into one unique mission is the inspiration of Fr Pedro Arrupe, who launched JRS as a spiritual and practical response to refugees' needs, and the consequent JRS mandate, summed up in General Congregation 34: *There are over 45 million refugees and displaced persons in today's world, 80% of whom are women and children... The Jesuit Refugee Service accompanies many of these brothers and sisters of ours, serving them as companions, advocating their cause in an uncaring world.*

Over the years, those involved in JRS have asked for clarification of its identity and mission. To accompany, serve and advocate... time and again there have been initiatives to flesh out this mandate, to articulate its meaning in more depth and detail. Such endeavours have always been accompanied by a realisation of the inherently spiritual dimension of work with refugees, a dispossessed people on the move: *To join JRS is to embark on a journey of faith accompanied by refugees*, was the main conclusion of a JRS meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, in 1995. Many JRS workers have reflected – frequently in groups – on the spiritual meaning and values represented by refugees, what message they have to share with JRS and the rest of the world. Motivated by awareness that the spirit and tradition which animate JRS need to be handed on, they often recorded their insights to share them with others who would join the mission sooner or later.

This gradual, spontaneous search expresses a need voiced several times over by JRS workers from all walks of life. In one example, back in 1997, a JRS internal ‘communications audit’, which sought feedback on diverse organisational features, revealed a strong cry for greater emphasis on and definition of aspects of the faith, the cornerstone on which JRS is built. *God in Exile: Towards a Shared Spirituality with Refugees* evolved precisely as a response to this need. It is a compilation of reflections from a spiritual perspective shared by people – religious, lay people and refugees – who are part of the JRS mission. It does not pretend to be the final answer in what is essentially a process; rather it is a step in the journey towards discovering, together with refugees, a spirituality arising out of the experience of forced exile and the specific faith-based response of JRS.

*God is calling us through this people...* the journey of JRS started 25 years ago with Fr Arrupe’s appeal to the Society. I am grateful to see how JRS remains faithful to Fr Arrupe’s vision to heed God’s call through the refugees, responding as a pilgrim church and *going anywhere for the greater service of God*. A value of this book is that it underlines the typically Ignatian nature of the JRS response. Operating in the ever-changing world of displaced people, JRS is called to be forever flexible and open to new challenges, and it has always found direction in Ignatius’ criteria for apostolic work, giving priority to situations of great need, to places where a more universal good may be achieved and to needs

unattended to by others. The significance attached by JRS teams to these ways of proceeding is clearly spelled out by many who contributed to this book; they emphasise how they constantly seek to discern God's voice in the cry of those most in need, to evaluate when, where, and how to respond. Discernment is matched by a desire for *excellence in service*, a wish to excel which is rooted not in *scholarly excellence*, but in a commitment to Christ, as Fr Arrupe told Jesuits working with refugees in Asia in 1981. It is deep personal love for him which shapes solidarity with the poor. Many JRS workers live their work as a direct expression of their discipleship of Christ; they are motivated to reveal his face to those they serve, so their presence may be a concrete sign of God's love in exile.

The service of members of JRS is rooted in a sacred reality which is echoed time and again in the pages of this book: every person, every refugee, has the breath of God and is made in his image, and each deserves to be treated like the human being that she is. Striving to ensure the dignity of all is respected, many JRS workers find their humanity and identity as children of God affirmed in the process; the realisation dawns on them that all are brothers and sisters on a shared quest for peace and justice, the search for God. So all may walk together on this journey. *I am accompanied by refugees*, writes one Jesuit brother who worked in eastern Africa for several years. Another contributor described accompaniment as a 'treasure' with many hidden layers. The presence of JRS among refugees is one of breaking bread together, of sharing and community – described here as *friends in the Lord*. It is also a partnership; the mission of JRS is implemented not *for* but *with* refugees, who bring their unique contribution to services offered. JRS workers pay tribute to what they learn in this joint venture from refugees' courage, humour and spiritual resilience, and from their zeal to give to others what they have received. *God is with us*, write refugees and JRS workers alike: God is with us as self-respect and hope are restored through relationships formed in exile, as our accompaniment confirms God is present in human history, even its most tragic episodes.

Also vividly illustrated is another crucial feature of the JRS presence among refugees, that is, to be a concrete sign of God's reconciliation. JRS and the Society are called, together with the rest of the Church, to work for peace. Witnessing to reconciliation is a role the Church

should play everywhere and its contributions should be substantial, *love not in words but in deeds*. One of the principles of JRS is to serve everyone, equally, even in places where doing so could be sensitive and even dangerous. The presence on JRS teams of people from different faiths – many of who have contributed to this book – is a tangible witness to the courage of daring to reconcile. This inter-faith dimension is enriching for the life of JRS as we share ideals of faith and service inherent in our beliefs, contributing to building a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society based on mutual tolerance.

This book does not attempt to idealize the experience of displacement. There is no question that forced exile is evil, and its sorrows and difficulties find expression in the reflections shared here: the pain of being a refugee, the frustration of workers unable to meet refugees' urgent needs; the challenge of meaningfully accompanying thousands of people in a refugee camp; being helpless in the face of stiff detention policies of asylum seekers, and many others. Ultimately, however, a dogged resolve reveals itself, rising above the hardships described to meet the challenge of discovering how God is present in the suffering of exile.

There is also a determination to respond to the call of God to his Church to seek justice. Work with refugees is not merely a question of love; it is also a question of justice, and we are all – religious and lay people alike – urged to not only speak about Christ's love and justice, but to act to see justice done. Refugees are a visible sign of vast global injustice and violations of human rights. This is why we must struggle to redress that balance, ever questioning prevailing attitudes and structures, especially those that discriminate against the poor and oppressed.

Any attempt at describing a shared spirituality with refugees would be incomplete without reference to the rich, scriptural tradition of exile. In the Bible, God's chosen nation sought to follow him as they struggled through the desert in search of the Promised Land. This book is a testimony of a parallel spiritual journey unfolding today: of refugees and people on the move in search of a land of peace and justice, and of JRS workers who join them on their mission to rebuild humanity.

*Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ  
Superior-General, Society of Jesus*





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## Chapter 1

# **'FOR GOD HAS ALSO LOST A SON'**

## **A Biblical perspective of exile**

## 'FOR GOD HAS ALSO LOST A SON'

After an act of sabotage, writes Elie Wiesel, Jewish author and Nobel Peace Prize winner about his time in Buna concentration camp, the Nazi guardians singled out three people who were to be executed in the presence of all the camp inmates. They were hanged and two men died quickly. But the third one, a 13-year old boy, was too thin and his weight was not enough to break his neck. His agony lasted more than half an hour and the prisoners were obliged to pass in front of him and look at him full in the face. Behind Wiesel a man asked, "Where is God now?" "And I heard a voice within me answer him. Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows..." (Cf. *Night*, E. Wiesel, London, 1981).

Human suffering, especially if inflicted by people, saps our faith and our belief in a merciful and compassionate God and maybe even in the ultimate goodness of humanity. Confronted by the tsunami in Asia, the war in Darfur, the endless anguish in Eastern Congo and in so many other places in our world, we wonder how God can allow such things to happen. Refugee camps, the plight of refugees or forcibly displaced women, children and men, are no exception: where is God in all this? How can we still dare to tell people God loves them?

***How can we still  
dare to tell people  
God loves them?***

The Bible shows us how more than 2,500 years ago women and men were already asking themselves the same questions. The Old Testament (OT) tells us how the people of Israel suffered war, violence, famine, persecution, and exile, and how they tried to find the presence of the loving God of the covenant (Ex 34:6-7) in all those realities.

We are all familiar with the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, when God freed his people from slavery and guided them through Moses to the Promised Land, but we may be unaware that the people of Israel went into exile twice. In 721 BCE the northern kingdom fell to the king of Assyria and the population was scattered. In 586 BCE Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem, the south-

ern capital, destroyed the Temple and the city, and took part of the population captive. The country was desolate. During her time in exile, however, Israel deepened her knowledge of God, and her faith changed forever. Nowadays Israel's experience becomes precious to us as we get involved in refugee work. In the pages that follow I will explore what the OT tells us about this experience, also highlighting the connections with Jesus' life and teaching, as a possible source of inspiration for JRS' spirituality in mission.

## *1. God accompanies us in exile*

There is no question of idealizing exile or forced displacement. Let us not be confounded. Its sheer existence is evil, and this is the way the Bible primarily looks at it. Nobody should feel obliged to flee one's land due to war, persecution or poverty. That is why the prophets sent by God to speak in his name and guide the people envisaged it first of all as a punishment that God might send upon Israel. In the 8th century BCE when Amos saw the people had strayed far from the paths of the Lord, he threatened them with exile: *Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parcelled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land"* (Amos 7:17).

But it was another story when exile and deportation had actually fallen upon Israel and evil seemed to triumph making the innocent suffer. Was God actually punishing them? Habakkuk protested: *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails* (Hab 1:2-4). Jeremiah lost heart and despaired: *Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A child is born to you, a son", making him very glad... because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?* (Jer 20:14-18)

We are no different from them. The sight and experience of evil harm us deeply. We feel wounded and are tempted to think God has forgotten us or is not listening. This is why the prophet Isaiah told the Jewish community exiled in Babylon (6th century BCE): *But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands* (Is 49:14-16).

This is the key experience which must nurture our spiritual life: the closeness of God. God is with us. As a Burundian widow from Lukole camp in western Tanzania said: *God understands us for he has also lost a son*. Scholars debate the meaning of Yahweh (YHWH), God's name revealed to Moses in the OT, but there is no doubt in the Gospel. Jesus is also called 'Emmanuel' meaning *God is with us* (Mt 1:23), and his final words to the disciples are *I am with you all days till the end of the world* (Mt 28:20). Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross. He accompanies us in suffering and death too.

The prophets teach us, as do the psalms, that we should not break off our communication with God. In the Bible women and men keep talking to God in all sorts of situations, health or sickness, victory or defeat, success or failure. As such, no situation prevents our relationship with God. We just have to find our own way. Moses, Deborah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, Judith, Mary, Jesus... found their own words to express what they felt. There is nothing here against traditional prayers, only a call to discover the invitation men and women make to us from the Bible to address God spontaneously, with great freedom.

Interestingly enough Ignatius of Loyola shares these two intuitions. The point of departure of his Spiritual Exercises (SpEx), called *Principle and Foundation*, states that we should not seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, for we can serve God in all circumstances (SpEx 23). Later on, he advises us to talk with God as a friend talks to a friend (SpEx 54). Therefore the first call, especially when confronted by evil and suffering, is to keep in touch with God, linked to the source of good and love that he is. That is the only way to withstand evil. *Love alone can*

*teach us to penetrate the hidden goodness of the things we know* (Th. Merton). That is what Jesus himself did at Gethsemane (Mk 14:32-42).

## ***2. An opportunity to renew our relationship with God and the other***

This double biblical intuition, shared by Ignatius, that God is present in any situation and that we can communicate with him does not imply sickness is equal to health or war to peace. Absolutely not. What it does mean is that the challenge for us is to discover how God is present in exile, what God is telling us. If exile means neither punishment nor abandonment by God, then we need to change our sight to discover its significance. The prophet Ezekiel wrote to people who had suffered exile: *[Thus says the LORD God:] I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God* (Ezek 36:24-28).

The word of God is sharper than a double-edged sword (Heb 4:12) and challenges our pre-conceptions. Israel had to learn not to make of the land an absolute

value, even if it was the Promised Land. God wants to free people from exile, as from any kind of oppression, but in God's eyes the liberation from sin, from any kind of evil brought about by our actions and attitudes, is at least as important as liberation from exile. The situation prior to forced displacement is not necessarily the ideal to seek. We can deceive ourselves thinking of return or longing for resettlement while forgetting our neighbour's need close to us. Experience teaches us that to be in one's own land is no better for justice

***If exile means neither  
punishment nor  
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and peace if our hearts are still filled with hatred, envy, selfishness or violence. Exile appears then as a chance for conversion (M. Raper,

**After seeing the worst of us in what causes it, exile may bring about the best in us.**

*Everybody's Challenge*), an opportunity to come to know God better, the way he is present and active in history and in our lives, what he wants from us, and, ultimately, who he is. It is a chance to let God change our hearts so we may change our lives and relationships.

*After seeing the worst of us in what causes it, exile may bring about the best in us* (F. Masawe SJ). Let us briefly see how we can recognize and accompany God's action:

a) **The sign of God is at hand.** As simple and ordinary, and, at the same time, full of life, as a child who is born: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel* (Is 7:14). This is also the sign chosen by God for the coming of Christ which was given to the shepherds (Lk 2:8-18) and the wise men (Mt 2:9-12). The images Jesus chose for his parables are also taken from every day life (Mk 4:26-32; Mt 13:1-52).

b) **The sign of God is non-violent:** *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice* (Is 42:1-3).

c) **God comes to us through the other:** *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, here I am* (Is 58: 6-9). We

cannot separate love for God from love for our neighbour, as St John said: *Those who say, "I love God", and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen* (1 Jn 4:20).

### ***3. Time to discover the real face of God as a source of hope***

Today, it is commonplace to speak of the three big monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although the three affirm that there is only one God, the influence of Judaism on the shaping of the other two in this regard is evident, as it is much older. But when did this belief in one God start in Israel? For some centuries after settling in the land of Canaan, Israel struggled among the Canaanite peoples to keep the faith in the Lord (YHWH). All the peoples around Israel had several gods, while, in contrast, Israel proclaimed her faith in one God. Then, in the middle part of the 6th century BCE, a prophet arose from among the deportees in Babylon. We even ignore his name. He is known only as Second Isaiah, as his writings were added to the book of Isaiah. Today we find them in chapters 40-55. This prophet proclaimed: *Thus says the LORD "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god... I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host... There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other"* (Is 45:5,12,21-22).

***How can I harm the  
life of another if our  
lives are both the gift  
of the same God?***

An exile was the first human being to affirm monotheism and deportees were the first persons to believe in it. For the first time in her history Israel heard that not only had she one god, but that her god was the unique God. All the peoples of the earth had to turn to this God for it was the only one. Today we consider monotheism as the first call to peace and solidarity. The fact that we believe all human beings share the same creator helps us to realize the atrocity of war and violence. How can I harm the life of another if our lives are both the gift of the same God? To go to war

saying that 'God is with us', 'Allah Akbar' or 'in God we trust' is simply blasphemy, that is, we are making wrongful use of God's name (cf. Ex 20:7). We are manipulating God. Whoever believes in one God must admit that God cannot be for one people and against the other. Friends and enemies share the same God. The God of Israel, the God of Christianity and the God of Islam are ultimately the same and one God albeit perceived through different cultural and religious traditions.

This God is willing to continue to reveal himself again in exile. God is in our history, in our present, and also in our future. We have God's promise through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel: *Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt", but "As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land (Jer 23:7-8). Thus says the Lord GOD: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil". (Ezek 37:12-14)*

The promise brings us hope. The Lord has committed his name to liberation, he has given his word. As God did in the Exodus, he is engaged to free his people and to give his spirit to us. But as Ezekiel says, we will know God's power not only if return eventually happens, but already when he brings us up from our graves and makes us live. The challenge of life is already posed to us. The real return is not from one land to another, but from death to life, from antagonism among us to solidarity, from rivalry to community building. If all this is missing, no land can be the promised one, none can be holy.

#### **4. What about Jesus?**

On 24 September 1995, a few days after my arrival in Tanzania, I entered the chapel of Lukole camp for the first time – built by



*The flight to Egypt, painting in the chapel of Centro Astalli, JRS Italy  
Photo: L. Putti*

Burundian refugees – to attend mass. I was struck by the painting on the wall behind the altar: Joseph taking Mary and the child to Egypt to protect Jesus from King Herod’s wrath (cf. Mt 2:13-22). Years later I found the same scene in the chapel of Centro Astalli in Rome, this time a colourful picture drawn by an Ethiopian refugee. This text of the Gospel of Matthew, the flight to Egypt, lies deep in our hearts as we see Jesus becoming a refugee himself, his parents forced to flee to save their child’s life. I think the text somehow supplements what we read towards the end of the same Gospel of Matthew in the parable of

the final judgement (Mt 25:31-46), when we hear Jesus saying: *Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me* (Mt 25:34-35).

The text could easily go on: *For I was a refugee and you accompanied me, you served me, and you advocated my cause.* Sometimes the word of God becomes transparent: *Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40). To hear this may not make things any easier when we are struggling with the problems and conflicts of every day life in JRS. But it can give us hope when we stop for a while and draw breath to realize that even when we wonder *Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?* (Mt 25:37), Christ is always

the Emmanuel, and is waiting for us in the people we meet.

***For I was a refugee and you accompanied me, you served me, and you advocated my cause.***

It is true that during his adult life Jesus was neither a refugee nor did he work with displaced people. However, we see him reaching out people in

need through his teaching and especially his healings and miracles. The gospels show us Jesus concerned with the integral welfare of the human being. Pity draws him to the crowds of people who had nobody to take care of them and he assists and feeds them (Mk 6:34ff). He dares to trespass social, cultural and religious boundaries when he heals a man on the Sabbath (Mk 1:21-28) or a leper by touching him (Mk 1:40-45) or, conversely, when he accepts that a woman with a flow of a blood may touch him (Mk 5:25-34). Amid all these encounters, there is another one – maybe not so well known – that can help especially to root our hope as JRS members. It is Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:24-30) or, rather, her encounter with him, as Mark tells us that Jesus did not want to meet anybody at the time (Mk 7:24). The setting is noteworthy: Jesus is alone – the disciples do not appear in the passage – and has left Jewish land to go to the pagan territory of Tyre in the

northwest. He enters a house and wants to remain incognito but a woman, a native of that region, a Syrophenician, that is, a Greek with a different religion and culture, breaks into the house and requests that Jesus heal her daughter who is possessed by an evil spirit.

Jesus rejoins: *Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs* (Mk 7:27). Jesus' words take us by surprise. Why is he refusing her? We cannot accept that Jesus is testing the woman as some scholars thought in the past. Rather, it seems as if Jesus shares the views of his people who looked down on non-Jews as dogs because they did not belong to the chosen people. An attitude maybe worsened by the fact that Galilee, Jesus' home region, was exploited economically by the more developed Syrophenicia which used to tap into Galilean agricultural products.

*But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"* (Mk 7:28) The woman is quick. She does not question Jesus' statement openly. She keeps using Jesus' image of children and dogs, but she manages to break the temporal separation and introduces a definite change: the dogs do not have to wait, for actually, even if it is through the crumbs, they partake in the bread at the same time as the children! *Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter"*. *So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone* (Mk 7:29-30). We feel relieved. Jesus' first words mounted the suspense... But then he announces the child is free from her sickness, and the woman returns home to find her daughter healed.

We have been trying hitherto to keep the perspective of exile: what Israel experienced, felt, heard in exile about God, how God communicated with her, how Jesus, Mary and Joseph became refugees according to the Gospel of Matthew. Now this text of Mark brings a new perspective. Jesus is not a refugee but he leaves his land on his own accord. This may be more the case of the JRS worker who leaves her or his country, or town, or just her or his house every day to join JRS. How can Jesus inspire us?

Jesus' situation and reaction can be ours: He is in a foreign territory, he is met by a stranger who crushes his plans of tranquillity, who happens to be a woman of different culture and religion, and maybe even a representative of those who oppress his people, and she is requesting help. And Jesus answers 'no'. However, the woman comes back with humility and intelligence, with the courage of a mother fighting for her daughter, and Jesus is capable of acknowledging defeat. *For that word* says Jesus literally in Greek (Mk 7:29). He knows the demon is gone but he has to accept that he is not the one making the healing happen. The cause has been the woman's response to Jesus. God, Father and Mother, has heard that word and has granted the healing. I think in that word said by the woman, Jesus hears his father's voice telling him to break down the barrier of his prejudices and to accept the intrusion of the other in need. Gender, origin, culture, and religion separated Jesus from the woman. Moreover, he did not want to be disturbed. The woman teaches Jesus to bridge those differences.

When we feel difference cuts us apart, that a new demand breaks our plans, when we are exhausted or fed up with our work, even tired of being taken advantage of, and we feel our prejudice is making someone else pay for it, we may find it consoling to know Jesus also found himself in a similar situation and refused to accept the other in need. Jesus understands us for he was in the same situation. We can still hope. The woman insisted and Jesus finally allowed this stranger to enter his life and indeed he discovered how God was talking to him through her. The woman taught him that everybody has right to God's salvation. As Elías, one Jesuit companion put it, the woman converted Jesus. Hopefully, like Jesus, we will also be able to learn something if we allow ourselves to be defeated by the other!

***They have made you  
a better person.***

These few pages are filled with "we", "us" ... It is true the perspective of refugees differs from that of JRS' workers or volunteers. Despite the differences I consider that what we share is more than what makes us different. From the Bible we learn we are all children of God, sharing our human condition, the search for good, justice and beauty, the search for God. Because we all seek, we can help one

another along the road. During my time in JRS I have tried to accompany, serve and advocate the cause of refugees. However, as the Syrophoenician woman enlightened Jesus, my experience is that refugees have helped me in many more ways. In Lukole and Lumasi, in San Saba and Lainé, refugees have been my masters of prayer and friendship, of hospitality and generosity, of commitment to life and community, of work and relentless hope. As a friend told me, *they have made you a better person*. The message of the Bible is clear. It happened to Israel and Jesus, it may also happen to us: exile is not a stumbling stone; it becomes the cornerstone for our faith and life!

*Pablo Alonso SJ  
JRS Tanzania*



Amaya Valcárcel/JRS

## Chapter 2

# BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

## Accompanying refugees

*A refugee camp is a rough school. But it is also a wonderful human and spiritual experience. I am rediscovering humanity here in Galang... here human solidarity is a reality and not just nice words. And here I find God. The refugees are my greatest benefactors because they reveal Christ and give him to me. They make the Gospel flesh of my flesh.*

Gildo Dominici SJ, Indonesia



## LEARNING TO LISTEN

I am an ethnic Karen Christian from Burma. The military ruling our country targets religious groups and ethnic minorities and my parents frequently suffered discrimination. Things became worse after the 1988 democracy uprising when my mother, a university lecturer, was refused a new ID card. In 1990, she left for Thailand. I followed in 1995, and I got a good job as sales coordinator for an engineering company in Bangkok.

Then a friend asked for help. He was chairman of the Tham Hin refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. When I visited the camp and saw our people's living conditions, I decided to do something for them. I interviewed camp elders, filmed video footage, and made a portfolio to raise funds for salaries to pay camp teachers. Together with my mother, I participated in camp activities. Our commitment became more intense in 1999 when my mother moved to Mae Sot on the border to teach English and to become chairperson of the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee. We constructed a primary school in a border village and rebuilt a clinic destroyed by Burmese troops. The school was also burnt down twice.

These activities made it impossible for my family to return to Burma. My younger brother fled in 2001 after he was interrogated about my mother's work. At the same time, I could no longer live in Thailand; my family members had been registered as terrorists. I had no choice but to register as a refugee with UNHCR.

My time waiting for refugee status was not easy. I lost my job and my legal status in Thailand, and my son lost his place in school. It was my turn to seek help. I approached an agency to which I had belonged for more than 10 years. I was asked a series of ridiculous, humiliating questions and my request was turned down. Why God, why?

At first I could not see why God was doing this to me. Then I understood: he had taken away everything from me but at the

same time he provided me with loving friends. Most of the support I received during my time of trial came from people of different religions or denominations.

One precious gift God gave me was a job in JRS as a programme assistant. In JRS, I learned how important it is to be a good listener, how to serve people without preaching a single word. Before, when my mother and I helped refugees and migrants, I thought I was living an upright, Christian life. But today I think differently: I must admit I unknowingly intimidated people by telling them what to do without listening to them. When I was in need and people turned me down without trying to understand my position, I felt so sad. Many times, I had to hold back tears.

Nowadays, I never say “no” to people who ask for help. Even if something is beyond my capabilities, I say: *This is as far as I can go, but please let me ask someone else who may be able to find a solution.* This puts people at ease.

Today, I am resettled in California. Although I no longer work for JRS, I still feel like part of the family.

*Richard Rama  
JRS Thailand*



## GOD KNOWS

I have been a refugee for most of my life. I remember clearly the day, years ago, when I fled my country, Burundi, to go to Zaire (today Congo) with my parents and five younger brothers and sisters. I was 17. We left on 25 April 1972.

When we reached Zaire, we settled near Mboko village in Uvira. I was captured by the Zairean army twice between 1972 and 1974, and I was forced to carry their loads while they fought in the jungle. One time, I was so badly beaten I had to be carried back to Mboko.

Eventually, it became too hard to stay in the village. We used to benefit from food distribution, and when this was stopped, our only option was to rent land to cultivate our own food. But we had no money, and in 1975, we moved to a nearby camp for Burundian refugees where we were allowed to cultivate some land. I was to live and work in the camp for the next 21 years.

I became a catechist, serving Catholics in the camp which was a substation of Mboko parish. After 10 years, I became the head catechist. I also helped out in a clinic in the parish. I met a Congolese woman, Murishi Janette. We married and started a family.

In 1996 we were forced to move again when civil war reached Uvira. The camp population was dispersed. My family – my mother, wife, eight children, and myself – crossed Lake Tanganyika to Tanzania. For two months, we sheltered in a church. However, lack of food made us progressively weaker and we decided to go to a camp. By the time we reached a transit camp, my four-year-old daughter was seriously ill so my wife, together with our baby, took her to hospital. Meanwhile, the rest of us were moved to Nduta camp, a few hundred kilometres away. My wife was frantic as she did not know where we had been taken. It was six months before we were reunited, a very difficult time for us.

Today, my life continues as a refugee. My mother died and is buried here in Nduta. In 1998, my ninth child was born. We are sheltered

from war and we receive food every two weeks. But camp life is very hard. Our family and friends are scattered, I do not know where some of my brothers and sisters are. I continue to serve the church, working as a catechist with JRS. Part of my work involves teaching and preparing young couples for the sacrament of marriage. We built a small library with the help of JRS, and I am the librarian. I enjoy sharing our few books with those who come.

There are many difficulties and little joy for us refugees, yet it is impossible for a Christian to lose hope. The patience and endurance I need come from God. After more than 30 years of being a refugee, I am confident God knows when I will return home to Burundi.

*Nathaniel  
JRS Tanzania*



## LOVING ALL WITHOUT DISTINCTION

I am a Muslim woman from Ambon island in Indonesia. Born and bred in a family within a homogenous society of strong Islam tradition, I seldom, if ever, made friends with people from other religions. This is not unusual; most members of my community live that way.

The town of Ambon was seized by sectarian violence on 19 January 1999, a Muslim feast day marking friendship and forgiveness. A brawl among thugs flared into communal conflict and I saw smoke rising in the air, people running and houses set on fire. All of a sudden, Muslim people fled from Christian-dominated areas and vice-versa. I feared my hometown would be transformed into a battleground of different faiths.

I used to hear rumours of Christian attacks or sectarian clashes, but my worst predictions were nothing compared to what happened. My home was destroyed, all my university papers were burnt and my mother's dream of seeing me graduate in economics had to be put on hold. It was a shocking time which made me sad and afraid.

It was also a time when I entered a world which would change the course of my history. Attending a UNICEF meeting in the course of my work with a local NGO, I met the JRS director in Maluku, Fr Roni Nurharyanto. He asked me and three of my friends to join JRS; we accepted because we wanted experience in humanitarian work.

However we immediately became suspicious when we grasped the meaning of the words 'Jesuit' and 'Catholic'. We became more wary still when we arrived at the JRS office in the Christian area and met the staff, all Catholic. We also met a Protestant youth from Ambon, who turned out to be a child soldier. Fearing for their safety, my friends resigned, but I stayed on. The simple, flexible mission of JRS as I understood it made me feel comfortable and gave me faith to reach out to internally displaced people.

Difficulties soon arose. Displaced Muslims remained suspicious of JRS. To make matters worse, my mother was angry and afraid when she heard I was cooperating with Christians; I could be targeted as a traitor

and even killed. I was threatened and my neighbours avoided me, spreading false rumours about me. This made me sad, but I persisted. I believed I was on the holy and true path of God, and he would protect me.

Initially, I was apprehensive to work among displaced Christians. On my first visit to one of their communities I tried smiling, but I came up against a brick wall. Most people did not respond and even avoided me. They seemed surprised to see a woman in Muslim dress. However, some people welcomed my smile and a faint light shone in my heart. This very first encounter made me determined to accompany and serve all displaced people, whether Muslim or Christian. Some may reject my presence, but I am convinced all will accept me someday because I am well-meaning.

Gradually, my family started to believe in my work, especially my mother. She is so proud of me now, telling visitors at home of my service among displaced people.

As one who believes in God, I always pray according to my faith. Before, I never bothered about other religions; in JRS I learned how to live with them, to love without distinction because all people are equal.

*Sitna Aisyiah  
JRS Maluku, Indonesia*



## DELISE SALUM: A PROPHET OF JOY

In 125 AD, the historian Aristides said of the first Christians: *They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another ... He who has, gives liberally to him who has not.*

The measure of JRS work in accompanying refugees can be determined only by the love we share, revealed in our mutual giving. For countless JRS workers, it is displaced people, outcasts, and victims of war who are messengers of the spirit of joy and service found in the early Christian communities. This is the experience of JRS in seven years of working on a site for displaced people in Kiyange outside Bujumbura.

Delise Salum is one such 'prophet' for JRS Burundi. When I witness his joyful presence in the team and recall what he has lived, I find myself arriving ever closer to a deeper appreciation of the wonder that is the human species.

Delise grew up selling nuts on the streets to help his mother buy vegetables from the local market. His father worked as a mechanic and shared with Delise not only his profession but also his Muslim faith and the spirit of offering it inspired. He always returned from journeys made for work with fruit or a goat to share with their neighbours in the impoverished area of Cibitoke.

When war broke out in Burundi in 1994, the father of Delise was murdered by Burundian soldiers ordered to liquidate 'controversial' Hutu neighbourhoods. After three days of waiting in vain for his father's return home, Delise was escorted with his mother to identify his remains, an image Delise recalls vividly to this day.

Their home ransacked, the family of Delise was left no choice but to join thousands of people fleeing the violence. Their long journey over the next three years would take them to former Zaire and to the hills above Bujumbura, where they ate raw roots to survive. Once they stayed in a camp for displaced people in the national stadium, where Delise dressed as a girl to avoid being arrested and murdered by the

Burundian authorities. Finally, his family was offered a home in a forest, now known as Kiyange. There, JRS asked Delise to participate in the construction of a permanent site. In exchange, Delise received a modest stipend which he used to pay for his education downtown; every day he would walk nearly three hours to school and back.

After receiving a diploma as a mechanic, Delise joined JRS to tend to the staff vehicles. His ever-present smile and joy, in spite of and because of his arduous past, continue to reveal the essence of accompaniment to the rest of the team. Thanks to his deep Muslim faith, he exudes the same spirit that inspired his father's generosity and echoes the early Christian community model. The Muslim poet, Raj Rabban, wrote: *Love is not something you feel, but rather something you become.* This is what the JRS mission to accompany is about, and the prophetic presence of Delise nudges us ever further towards such conversion and surrender.

*Steve Hege  
JRS Grands Lacs*

Darrin Zammit Lupi



## FRIENDS IN THE LORD

JRS

The sense of accompaniment in JRS first came to me in friends and colleagues who face this work together. I was taken to the plane for Khartoum by a Jesuit companion, who coming from Africa could offer me a quiet reassurance in the face of the huge unknown. At the other end of the journey, I met a Sister who was joining the same project and we moved to Port Sudan together. We have kept in touch ever since. The experience of another Jesuit colleague in Sudan taught me how to manage work with refugees. One joyful way was to celebrate all possible signs of life and hope, especially birthdays and festivals, to dispel the starkness of the utter poverty of many refugees and displaced people from Eritrea, Ethiopia and from within Sudan. We lived in a team, lay people and those from religious orders together; a simple life, devoid of too much mass media. Social life together in the evenings was usually a delight. Refugees were part of the team. Even with cultural differences between us, we shared a spirit of working together, in making nursery, primary and secondary schools work and in getting social assistance targeted at the right people.

After some time in JRS, I realised I often felt more accompanied by refugees I have known, than the other way around. I think of a young Sudanese widow who called me her brother, of an Ethiopian man who gasped with concern when one of our staff was very sick, of many hours refugees have spent explaining to me the culture of their people and homelands, of particular food offered and entertainment in the homes of many who were willing to share what little they had. This experience reminds me of the verse in Psalm 139: *If I... settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me.* I go to places where life is most difficult and find the poorest of people are my consolers.

Accompaniment is possible in friendship. It unites the first part of our mission, to accompany, with the second part, to serve *as companions*. Accompaniment is a form of love which is healing and reconciling. Henri Nouwen, in his book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: a Story of Homecoming*, suggests that a mature person's role is not just to look

for and accept forgiveness for failures and shortcomings, but from there to become more like the Father in offering forgiveness and means of reconciliation to others.

I have found this responsibility, at times, a burden. Do I have the ability to accompany others, to help them mature in the work they do and the people they are? I can do it best when my feelings reach the stage of loving the people I am with. At the bedside of a staff member who was dying of AIDS, I felt I had to somehow make sure that he knew of God's compassion. The relief he seemed to get from our being with him led me to think that, yes, we can effectively be with, accompany people in ways that make a difference.

*Stephen Power SJ*  
*JRS Eastern Africa*

## A MOTHER'S PRAYER

JRS

It is 4am on Tuesday morning. Today is one of the days for my usual weekly visit to Osire refugee camp, but before I leave home for the trip of more than 250 km to get there, I have to make sure my children (I am a mother of five) are up and ready for school. They will have to do everything without me for the whole day and prepare for the next day, because it will be late when I come back from Osire. No time to look at their homework, no time for cooking. Just a light meal for dinner will do.

Osire camp hosts two schools for the refugee community: primary school learners attend in the morning and secondary school students in the afternoon. How am I involved? I work for JRS Namibia as an education officer and my weekly visits bring me in touch with the most wonderful people.

At Osire, no one goes past without a word of greeting. *Hallo Sister* or *Hallo Madam, how are you?* Even the little ones on their way to class will say a word or two. Chatting with one such girl, I found out she is nine years old, and she lives with her older sister who attends secondary school. To my question where their parents are, she just shakes her head to give me the message that she does not know.

My heart goes out to her and I think of my mother who was orphaned at the same age. My mother told me much about her suffering; although she had many relatives in Namibia who could take care of her, none did. I think about this little girl in a foreign country with no parents, how hard can life get? Who is there to take proper care of her? Who is helping her with homework? Who will make sure that she has something to eat and drink before going to school, and that she is properly dressed?

On my way back to Windhoek, I think of all the people I have met throughout the day to help them cope with their problems. But uppermost in my mind is the nine-year-old girl. I am a mother, but I can only be a mother to her once a week. There are so many to attend to, she is just one of them.

Sometimes I pray for these little ones (the children in Osire, my own), a prayer to guide them through the years so that one day they will have a full life back in their motherland, a prayer so that they will make the right choices. What more does a mother want for her children?

*Rosalie Nehoya  
JRS Namibia*



Don Doll SJ/JRS

## BREAKING BREAD, SHARING LIFE



Reading the Gospel story of the disciples' walk to Emmaus (Lk 24:1-35), I am reminded of a painting I saw in Mexico. The image of walking feet stared out at me: battered, scarred feet of an oppressed people. At the time, I was living and working with Guatemalan refugees and the painting left a deep impression on me. It symbolized the feet of thousands of refugees who are walking in the hope of finding shelter from danger. In my imagination, I saw Jesus walking with them.

Over and over in the Gospel, we read about Jesus walking: walking with his disciples, walking with the crowd. Let us accompany Jesus on his walk with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

1. After **reading** through the text carefully, let us **ask** for the grace to recognize Jesus in the people we meet during the day, and to be a sign of his presence to them.
2. We **imagine** Jesus joining two people on the road. They are disheartened and disappointed by recent events. *You must be the only one, they tell him, who has not heard the latest news from Burundi, Congo, and Rwanda. We follow the travellers as they continue: We had to flee our homes, hide in the forest; I lost my baby; I saw my father being killed, my sister raped, why is God doing this to me?*

We walk on and they tell their stories, terrible stories of loss, of pain and hardship. Jesus listens and then the walk continues in silence. We **feel** it is a peaceful silence, as if we sense someone is present with us who understands and shares our suffering.

3. After a while, we **listen to Jesus** as he gently asks some questions: *Do you remember the good times you had with your father? Can you recall your sister's joy when you returned from school? And what about the happiness when your baby was born? Quietly, we take in what he says: The people we love never really die; they still live in our hearts and our memories. You will come to know they live in you; you will not be left as orphans. You will live because they live.*

Our hearts and our steps are lighter now. Jesus is with us as we walk ahead and remember happier times: a father's love, children's laughter, a sister's smile. Thanks to Jesus, our hearts are filled again with the love of those relationships.

4. We **observe the impact of Jesus' presence** and words. *Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road? (Lk 24:32)* Now we are no longer strangers but companions, traveling together, sharing stories, listening, searching for understanding, finding deeper meaning in recent events we have lived. We feel our hope being rekindled. And we feel closeness with this new companion; we desire to hear more, to stay in his presence.
5. *Stay with us Lord; we have little but what we have, we will share. Some bread, some wine.* The invitation is accepted and then, the climax of the story: **Bread is broken**. Recognition. Our Lord and our God.
6. Jesus disappears, but he leaves us a symbol of his presence. Strengthened by the sharing of bread, we can **return together** to Jerusalem as the disciples did, back to the site of the crucifixion. We had initially run away from this place of suffering, but now we know Jesus is risen; he has shared his life with us and he encourages us to share it with others. He walks with us and at the same time *he is waiting for us there, in so many sisters and brothers with their eyes full of tears* (Lluís Espinal).

## ***Reflection***

Over the years, I have listened to many refugees tell their stories. When they come to the office, they are people I barely know, strangers. They share their stories of pain, hardship, fear, even despair. They ask: *What can you do for me? I have so many problems.*

Often, the simple fact of listening offers solace to refugees. Not always so to the listener. I frequently feel frustrated, stressed and tired, but then, a smile and *thank you for listening* reveals the presence of Jesus to me.

Listening and sharing, we try to find hope, a way forward. Their story becomes my story. I too have known moments of fear, doubt and pain. Listening to one another, we become companions. *We are companions on the journey; breaking bread and sharing life* (Carey Landers).

*We have broken the bread of our lives and recognized the Lord.*

## ***Prayer***

As we finish the walk to Emmaus with Jesus and the two disciples, I find myself praying: *Jesus, you who listened to the travellers and explained discouraging events to them, thank you for revealing yourself to me in the refugee, the displaced person. Thank you for granting me this opportunity and for helping me to be their companion, to break bread and to share your life.*

*Anne Elizabeth de Vuyst SSMN  
JRS Malawi*

*Suggested texts for further biblical  
contemplation about accompaniment*

- **John 4:1-42** The Samaritan woman
- **John 9:1-39** The healing of the blind man
- **John 21:1-14** The miraculous catch of fish



## DISCOVERING HIDDEN TREASURES



Long fascinated with small boxes, wooden, ceramic, or basket-woven; roughly hewn or finely crafted, I always marvel at their beauty, ponder and look for the treasure tucked inside. Sometimes, although they appear empty, something special is hidden within.

A few years ago, I was presented with a basket woven by a 15-year-old Rwandan refugee. Janete had just shared her experience of being an unaccompanied minor, struggling to survive in a Nairobi slum with her four-year-old half-sister. *How might I sell this?* It was her first, she had learned basket weaving in an attempt to earn money for food and shelter for herself and her sister.

It was a typical, traditional basket of the people of Rwanda and Burundi. A finely woven, decorative basket with a tight-fitting cover holds a similar, smaller one, which holds another, and still another is within, and finally a tiny one at the core; five baskets in all. As Janete presented me with this set of baskets, which held so much of her life, another journey of accompaniment began. Our lives touched and experiences became interwoven. Treasures are still being discovered.

Accompanying refugees through work with JRS has been like finding and opening small baskets, one after the other, discovering unexpected treasures in each. As a key dimension of the JRS mission, accompaniment inspires and calls for a profoundly unique approach to the service offered. It holds so much potential and always seems to call on us to give more. But where does the 'more' come from, the direction and strength for faithfulness to the call?

Accompaniment and faithfulness to the mission seem deeply rooted in the very spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola. Not only do the life and work of Ignatius inspire accompaniment, his spirituality teaches about and helps one discover a God passionately in love with and involved in our world, working to bring justice and hope, healing and reconciliation to all. How is this God found? For those working with JRS, it appears to be the treasure revealed in accompanying refugees.

## **The first basket: the journey of accompaniment**

*Beginning the journey of accompaniment  
is receiving and opening the first basket.*

*Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. That is, the one who loves gives and communicates to the beloved what he or she has, or a part of what one has or can have; and the beloved in return does the same to the lover (SpEx 231).*

For many, coming to and joining in the work of JRS may be the result of a desire to work for people in need, and for some, clearly with refugees. There is an inner call and the response, the beginning of a journey with forcibly displaced people. At first, we may think of it as a new journey for ourselves: a new job, perhaps in a new land and with another culture. And while this is true, there is much more.

We start to learn about becoming companions of forcibly displaced people on their journey, and this can take us far beyond any of our expectations or dreams. Their journey becomes ours. The journey of a refugee is not what many would consider typical, although millions experience the ordeal, fleeing for their lives, struggling to survive in a camp, detention centre, a foreign country. Accompaniment is not an easy task and really not a task at all, but a way of being with others in the services offered. The project or activity is only a very small component of the response called for by JRS. Quality and professional service are important, but the spirit and the way the work is carried out require so much more.

Glimpses of this 'more' are captured in numerous descriptions and reflections on the meaning of accompaniment. Even in the dictionary, the etymological meaning of accompaniment – *one who shares bread* – suggests a personal involvement and relationship. Scripture accounts of journeys, breaking bread and discipleship, draw us even further into the meaning of accompaniment. The writings by and about Ignatius as well as reflections on the mission of the Jesuits and JRS itself invite us to take up a great challenge. That so much is written suggests something of the powerful force of accompanying, of becoming a companion and having companions.

A moving description of the call and challenge to accompany refugees is found in the statement, *A Vision for JRS*, written five years after the inception of JRS: *While always ready to help refugees in their material and spiritual wants, and also in designing projects leading to a fuller and more independent life, we try to place special emphasis on being with rather than doing for. We want our presence among refugees to be one of sharing with them, of accompaniment, of walking together along the same path. In so far as possible, we want to feel what they have felt, suffer as they have, share the same hopes and aspirations, see the world through their eyes. We ourselves would like to become one with the refugees and displaced people so that, all together, we can begin the search for a new life. This attempt to identify with the poor and rejected, however hesitant and imperfect, has brought us untold blessings... In a word, we have found Christ again in the faces and lives of these abandoned peoples, a Christ who is beckoning and calling us to follow him.*

One cannot merely stay behind a desk and computer, see only numbers and case-loads, write reports, or rush around in hurried activity of construction or distribution of relief. It is a journey of being with, walking together, being available, sharing lives, listening and trying to understand, and becoming friends. This may all sound rather nice, but in reality it is quite scary to take those first steps of the journey.

Accompaniment takes us beyond the trips or “safaris” we plan, beyond collecting frequent flyer miles, souvenirs of baskets, stories, and experiences. It is about opening the basket of accompaniment and looking inside. Opening up to another involves a risk. It is a huge risk opening oneself to hundreds, even thousands upon thousands of refugees in camps, to their lives and experiences. The numbers, the needs, can be so overwhelming. And what does one do with all the suffering?

## **The second basket: attentiveness**

*Within the first basket of experience is another: attentiveness to the hidden gift.*

*To see with the eyes of the imagination; in my imagination I will hear; by my sense of smell I will perceive; by my sense of taste I will experience; by my sense of touch I will feel (SpEx 66-70).*

Suffering, meeting the suffering of others was one of my initial great fears in setting out on this particular journey of accompaniment. Already with many years as a missionary in Africa behind me, grateful and excited about the opportunity to work with refugees, I wondered and worried about what I would do in the face of so much suffering. How would I be with others in their pain?

If we have not been a refugee, we can only try to imagine the experience, the nightmare of violence and war, the loss of home and loved ones, the terror of flight, the tired desperation of struggling to survive, and the growing disillusionment and despair of waiting out years in a camp. Accompaniment is about being present day after day and paying attention to the moment, to individual people, and listening to their experiences. In attentive listening – listening with the heart – we receive not only their experiences but also their lives and suffering into our lives.

Walking through the refugee camp streets with throngs of children following, laughing at and with the stranger, was my beginning. It was their laughter that broke through my fear and perhaps the hardened sadness of some refugees with me that day. Some elderly people began laughing at the spectacle, and one said something to Chris, my refugee companion. After a good laugh, he shared her comment with me: *See this woman? See her love for us? Now we know that God is with us.* Perhaps it was my surprise at the words, the discovery which warmed my heart and freed it of some of the fear; at that moment, I recognized my companions and the ways I was being accompanied.

Our experiences surely are many; sometimes so many that they pass by unnoticed and are forgotten. Perhaps they are simply too difficult to grasp and understand, or they are too shocking and painful. We might begin just to collect experiences: a brief look and then we set them aside. Feeling so overwhelmed by what is going on and so busy with many demands of our projects, we fail to take the time and space needed to pay attention and listen to ourselves and what we are experiencing. Then the meaning and gifts within the experiences can be lost, and our accompaniment becomes more of a running and stumbling along.

## The third basket: remembering

*Remembering must be grasped and embraced.*

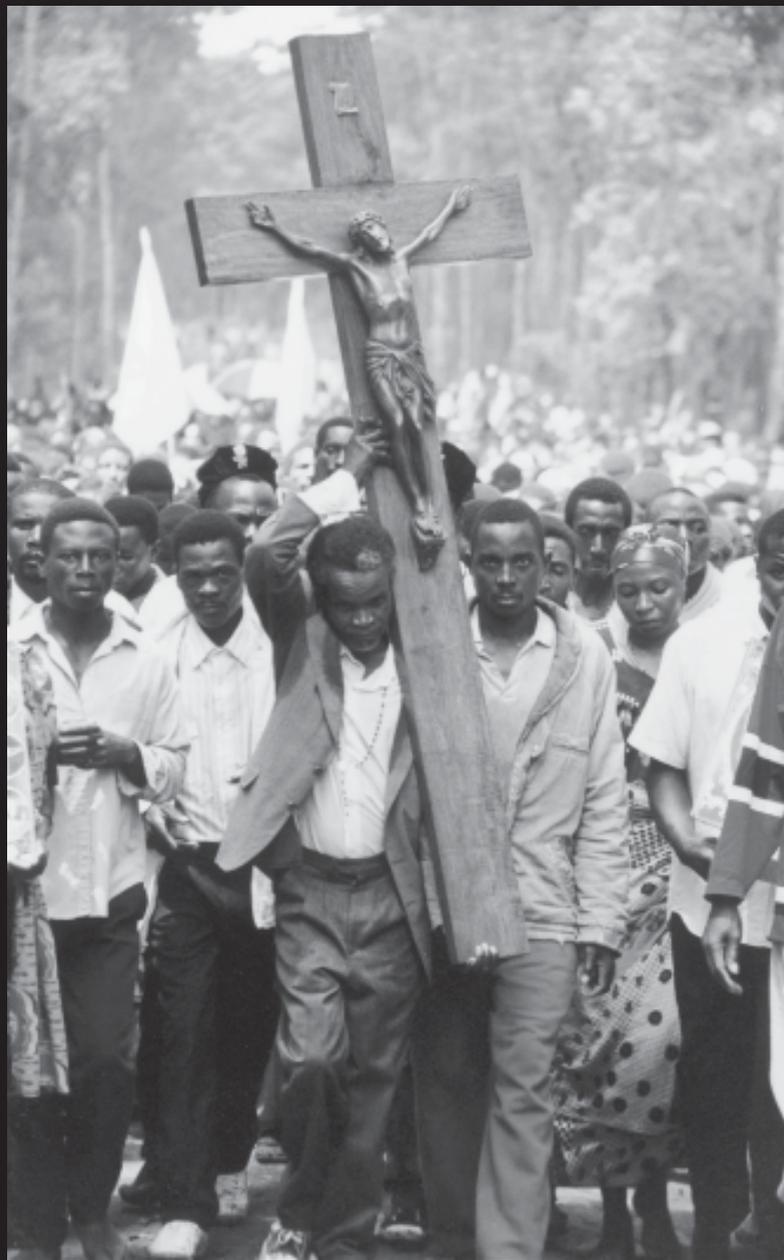
*I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received ... I will ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me (SpEx 234).*

Attentiveness to and remembering experiences become all important to the quality of our accompaniment. Recently, when I was feeling overwhelmed, I came across a quote which woke me up. *Remembering must be grasped, made tangible and embraced, lest we forget and risk slipping into a kind of amnesia of the will and spirit* (Phyllis Giroux). I realized I had moved into the mode of collecting experiences and had not given enough attention to their meaning. The experiences had been numerous and diverse, and in quick succession: northern Uganda, Rwanda, Darfur, Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and the demands of follow-up reports and meetings were taking over.

There was a sense of being choked with too much need, sadness and pain of those around me on my journey. My spirit was heavy and fast becoming numb as a way of coping. There was need to take time and space to remember and reflect on experiences that had gone into storage in my heart. Awareness of that need opened me up to the opportunity of remembering.

It began during the Holy Week services; the rituals of remembrance and celebration of the paschal mystery uncovered the gift of recollection. Joining others in the celebrations, I was freed to recall recent experiences and once again, I could embrace the pain I had seen in my journeys, in the visits and accompaniment of those who were part of my life. I began to move through and grasp meanings in the suffering.

The Passover, a meal shared, feet being washed, the cross, waiting at the tomb and the resurrection, can take us deeper into the mystery of human suffering and offer a glimpse of understanding, a new source of hope. Good Friday teaches the humility of God who does not fear to take on the immensity of human sorrow and anguish. As companions of refugees and of one another, we discover we are companions also of Jesus.



We need each other to be attentive, to take the risk of remembering, and to celebrate as well, so as to embrace the suffering and the joy of our accompaniment. Christian and Ignatian tradition of companionship empower us and renew our compassion for the journey of discipleship, of sharing the suffering of others. Suffering is surely a hidden gift. Yet it is not the suffering, but God's love that saves, the love of God manifested in Jesus on the cross and loving his own to the end. Our love with and for those who suffer brings comfort and hope and redeems the suffering.

## **The fourth basket: learning from experience**

*Embracing the experience leads to amazing gifts of new learning and life.*

*Afterwards I will reflect on this, to draw profit from it (SpEx 107).*

There is so much more than misery. Visiting a camp hospital in north-west Tanzania was part of my pastoral work for some years. In one camp hospital, the doctor was concerned about four children, aged one to 10. Their father was dead, their young mother was dying of cancer, and they were all staying at the hospital. So we – church and community leaders among the refugees and I – began regular visits to this family.

There were moments of prayer with the mother and arrangements for her to receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. One of us began looking for relatives and neighbours in the camp who might receive the children into their homes. Other agencies were contacted for the additional support they could offer. And Petronia spent of the little money she had to buy and prepare special food for the dying mother and her children. Sharing the little we all had, the outreach of service grew to embrace a new kind of caring for sick, elderly and dying people and vulnerable children.

The account in the Gospel of Luke of the two disciples travelling to Emmaus, feeling dejected and sad, meeting the stranger, sharing news and disappointment, to the moment of breaking bread and returning to Jerusalem with Good News, points to unexpected gifts of accompaniment and companionship. Hearts burn and eyes open to greater presence and powerful sources of life, energy, and love. A good deal

can be shared and learned in companionship with our JRS team members and other aid workers, with refugees and internally displaced people, and with Jesus.

Going beyond fear of suffering to being with those who suffer and even receiving their anguish, although very painful, can be an incredible journey, revealing many precious treasures. What have been some of these gifts? My companions taught me how to be and wait with the dying. I discovered this as I travelled to and waited with my dying mother, just a few months after I had begun my refugee ministry. And with her, I learned that dying is part of living. The experience graced me with new ways and perhaps a greater ability to wait with refugees.

There was a discovery about hope. Often we talk about what gives or brings the hope refugees and ourselves need. Frequently mentioned are the presence we offer each other, the courage and strength of those who suffer, achievements in our projects, education and other opportunities, all of which give hope and keep it alive. Yes, to all of this. But there is more: hope can be experienced as God's gift that we discover together in our companionship.

When we came to know each other, Nathaniel began to share his 30 years as a refugee. From the time of his youth, he lived in difficult and isolated camps, having fled from home because of conflict and again from his first country of asylum when it went to war. He spoke of the bitterness of life of a refugee; he shared about his suffering, separation from family members, and uncertainty of the future. Yet, married to a lovely wife and with many children, his life is all about service, being a catechist and librarian in the camp and frequently my translator, happy to bring joy to other refugees in what he can share.

When asked about hope, he said confidently: *For a Christian there is always hope. God knows when I will return home.* Some months later, his ninth child was born, and he named her Victorina Christina, a traditional name meaning *God knows*. While hope does not take away the pain and bitterness, it is God's gift. It is enough to know that "God knows".

Another treasure has been the gift of friendship, becoming real friends. Not a relationship based on one needing and another giving, but on

both of us needing and having something to give. Refugees may seem poor, and in some ways they are. But the riches they have and share in friendship, their lives and stories of pain, their courage and hope through hopelessness, their love and compassion, are invaluable treasures.

How does one discover treasures in accompaniment? By remembering, embracing, and contemplating the experiences, the suffering and joy, the mysteries and paradoxes; the treasures are all there. More and deeper meaning is revealed in the gospel truth of losing one's life as the way of finding it.

## **The fifth basket: finding God in all things**

### *Finding God at the very heart of all experience*

*I will consider how God dwells in creatures ... I will consider how God labours and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth (SpEx 234, 236).*

The deep faith and hope felt in our companionship with refugees may lead us to discover anew spiritual values and gifts. But the greatest treasure at the very heart of all experience is that of finding God. Fostering a contemplative attitude and a discerning heart, so central to Ignatian spirituality, helps us identify the presence of God in concrete events of ordinary life. Whether walking the streets in a refugee camp, visiting families in a slum, coping with a new crisis, writing a report, attending a meeting, or seeking funds, it is believing that God is to be found everywhere, in all of creation, even in the holy ground of our existence.

But what about the times when the ground does not seem so holy and evil appears to dominate, to take over our lives and those of our companions? When villages and refugee camps are attacked and burnt, and we lose our companions in new violence? Or when food rations are cut so drastically that hunger eats away at their spirit and lives?

What about when we grow tired of the misery, the multiple forms of deception, the endless pleas for more help when we have nothing left? There comes a point when we feel we cannot face another person, another need. Our patience wears thin, and we are irritable and even unkind to those we accompany: refugees, our colleagues and

also ourselves. We experience our own limitations and failures and find the evil of the world in our hearts. Where is God then? How do we seek and find God in such dark moments?

Such experiences are also real in our accompaniment. There are times when refugees do feel and are forgotten. At times, we too feel forgotten and abandoned, particularly in isolated places, when we go to the edge and open ourselves more and more to the suffering of others and their pain becomes ours. John, a refugee friend and colleague, shared his experience of being betrayed by someone he really trusted; the pain was so deep. He said he had no tears left because he had so many losses in his life. His weeping had become silent and invisible as he cried out for me to believe in him.

In these dark times, it may be simply a matter of remaining with the experience in faith, embracing the deepest pain and failure of our humanness. Being in darkness and emptiness becomes the experience of the cross, dying in utter abandonment. Our faith may also seem to disappear, and it is through our companions, those who dare to stand with us – a colleague, a friend, a refugee – that God breaks through. God's power and care envelope us through and with our companions.

*Our accompaniment affirms that God is present in human history, even in its most tragic episodes. We experience this presence. God does not abandon us (Pastoral Accompaniment among Refugees: the Jesuit Refugee Service experience, Mark Raper SJ). If we do not remain rooted in Christ, the source of our hope and courage, and if we do not discern our experiences, whether of suffering, loss, betrayal, evil or even of success, we can become lost and lose hope. We may find ourselves growing bitter, cynical, closing our hearts, and giving up on life and on God.*

One of the great paradoxes of our world and times is of tremendous potential and at the same time tremendous suffering. How can this be reconciled? Participating in the struggle and embracing its paradoxes, we become reconcilers with Christ. One experience of accompaniment clarifies another and all lead us deeper to the heart where we find God. Our life reveals God's loving, caring presence. We are not abandoned. God is with refugees; God is with us.

## Bearing Witness

Accompanying refugees and finding God in all things go hand in hand. As we find God, we become companions and discover our fellow companions. The words of the author, Sue Monk Kidd, in *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* suggest another challenge for us in accompaniment: *Ultimately our experience needs to become a force for compassion and justice in the world. We must bear witness to what we have experienced.* Through the journey of accompanying refugees, what must we bear witness to?

We witness to the tragedy of refugees, what Pope John Paul II described as *a wound that typifies and reveals the imbalance and conflicts of the modern world.* And we must witness to the vision, the possibility of new life, a new world of justice and love. This we envisage together and begin to live out as companions: companions of Jesus and of each other. The discernment process guides us in listening to refugees and to ourselves as we accompany them. Listening, even when we do not want to listen anymore, is essential for those who need to speak about their experience and for those who need to hear it, so that the truth can be acknowledged and forgiveness begin.

Finding God at the heart of our experience of accompanying refugees, a journey from loss, suffering, and courage to hope through hopelessness itself, we begin to see and understand our world from God's perspective. We see the world especially through the eyes of Jesus, who calls us to be compassionate as our God is, to love as he has loved us. But it goes beyond seeing and grasping the meaning of this new world; our experience becomes the power that can transform us and our world.

This is the journey we embark upon in accompanying refugees, the vision we bear witness to in our companionship. Not so much a witness of words, but of lives and a world transformed through living God's vision. It is receiving the gift of a Rwandan basket, one experience uncovered, holding, revealing another.

Roxanne Schares SSND  
JRS Eastern Africa



Ken Gavin SJ/JRS

## Chapter 3

# RESTORING HUMAN DIGNITY

## Serving refugees

*Working with refugees, I realise more and more that unless I give myself, it would be better if I gave nothing... I must give in such a way that my giving restores refugees' self-worth, their human dignity, in such a way that their hope and trust in humankind are rekindled.*

Bill Yeomans SJ, Thailand



## RESTORING FAITH TO PRAY AND HOPE TO LIVE

In my younger days, I knew Sri Lanka as a paradise where life was peaceful. I come from Adampan in Mannar district in the Tamil-dominated north of the island. A physical education teacher, I loved football and I had many friends. We were a community of happy people until July 1983 when civil war broke out.

I could not bear the atrocities committed by the armed forces. All young Tamil men were suspected to be militants, and arbitrary arrests and disappearances became commonplace. Worried, my parents married me off to save me from being recruited as a militant or being taken away by the army.

Within a few days of my marriage, the army entered my village and rounded up all the young men there. I was not at home so I was asked to report to the nearest army camp. When I did so, I was arrested. Fear gripped my entire family. My brother eventually managed to secure my release. The situation in Sri Lanka was worse than ever and displacement, hunger, and aerial bombing were the order of the day.

The arrival of the Indian Peacekeeping Forces (IPKF) did nothing to help matters and they left in 1990. By then, I had a daughter and two sons, and their education was fast becoming my prime concern. The Sri Lankan government had imposed a ban on essential items - including educational aids and food - in Tamil areas. It became impossible to live in Adampan and for the sake of my children's future I decided to cross over to India by boat as a refugee.

On the way, our boat sprang leaks and the engine failed. My family nearly succumbed to hunger and sunstroke. Miraculously God answered our prayers and we reached Indian shores in 1996. We were taken to Mandapam transit camp in Tamil Nadu. I stood miserably in a queue to get registered and receive aid. Just as I had lost all hope, we were welcomed by the JRS pastor in the camp, Fr S. Singarayar SJ, who provided us with immediate relief and a shoul-

der to cry on. His pastoral care went a long way in assuring refugees that every day was a new beginning and that life was worth living. He restored our faith to pray and hope to live.

In 1997, I was appointed as a JRS teacher and I was immediately inspired by the way JRS works. The volunteers' zeal gave me new confidence to do something for my community. I was trained and eventually I became headmaster of a new JRS school. Life as a refugee without an identity is tough, but JRS gave me a new identity and showed me a way ahead. Now I am information officer of the entire Tamil Nadu project. This work allows me to go to different camps and to meet my fellow refugees to discuss the future challenge to rebuild our motherland when we return.

Today, at 46 years, I know that were it not for JRS, I would have lost my way. JRS has been my companion ever since I became a refugee and has equipped me to meet life's challenges. May the spirituality inspiring JRS continue as long as there is need from people like me.

*Soosai Mariadass  
JRS Tamil Nadu, India*



## THE CHALLENGE OF HUMILITY

I do not know what nationality to give myself: Rwandese, Ugandan or Kenyan. I am a refugee by virtue of the fact that my mother fled from Rwanda in the late 1960s with her parents when she was a teenager. They took refuge in Uganda. There she met and married my father in 1973; he too was a refugee from Rwanda.

Because my mother is Tutsi and my father Hutu, conflict in Rwanda between the two ethnic groups caused misunderstanding between them. They separated in 1979, just a few months before I was born. At the same time, civil war in Uganda forced my mother – pregnant with me – to flee to Kenya with two small children. In 1986, I moved back to Uganda where I stayed with my grandparents until 2000, the year they both died.

I returned to Kenya to be with my mother. She had stayed on there and benefited from a scholarship to study home economics, specializing in tailoring. She later received a loan from JRS to buy a sewing machine and set up her own business. To this day she sells her handiwork in the JRS Mikono craft shop in Nairobi.

I came to know of JRS through my mother. Sometimes I am called to help in the Mikono craft shop as a shop attendant, and I meet refugees nearly every day through my work. The people I serve come with all sorts of problems, from a lack of food to no money to pay rent, medical care, and school fees. Most of the time I am not in a position to meet their needs, so the best I can do is to listen.

I am always tempted to compare my experience, or rather my mother's, with that of refugees I meet. This, I have realised, helps me to be sympathetic and empathetic: I am able to take each person as unique and not to generalise anyone's problems.

During the Last Supper, Jesus displayed his humility by washing the disciples' feet. This was a great act of service, and many other stories in the Gospels reveal the same, especially when Jesus healed the sick and fed the hungry. Jesus expects us, his followers, to embrace service to others, not to seek to be served.

This is one of my greatest challenges now that I serve refugees. Serving others can be very difficult and it calls for an act of humility. I feel refugees expect so much from me sometimes, especially when I listen to their sad stories and they expect me to solve their problems. The help they need may not be offered by the project I work on, so this is where I must be humble and let them know we are not in a position to assist them as they had hoped. I refer them elsewhere so they may receive the specific help they want. However, I do not think of myself as one who can solve all kinds of problems, so I often frustrate myself and at times, it seems to me that I frustrate refugees too.

*Agnes Asimwe  
JRS Kenya*



## TREATED AS A HUMAN BEING

In January 1995, the Ruiru refugee camp in Kenya was shut down, and we were transferred to Thika camp. Already there was a rumour that this camp would also close soon, so no one was at peace. Six months later, the rumour became reality when the UNHCR deputy protection officer broke the news. At that moment, a black cloud covered the camp. Some started to cry, others wanted to be alone, the rest tried to decide what to do.

We packed our belongings. Most of us were sent to Ifo camp in north-east Kenya. On the last day, only Ethiopians with full refugee status were left. We were given \$200 each and told to leave. Can you imagine: \$200 to begin a new life? It was a completely black day for us.

I went to Nairobi, wondering how my future would turn out. Two months later, I heard JRS was giving scholarships to refugees. I applied and was granted an interview. It was a great experience from the minute I arrived at the gate for the interview until I finished: I was treated as a human being.

I was chosen to study. I met such lovely people during this time. The JRS door was always open; the project director took time to talk to us if there was a problem and we felt so special when visited at college. When the two-year scholarship came to an end, I was saddened, knowing I would miss the love I found at JRS.

And then my dream came true. I had once been a volunteer in a clinic in the camp, and since then, I have had a desire to work with refugees, but how, when? On 19 June 2001, the JRS Eastern Africa office offered me a job as a driver. My life changed completely because in this office, not only do we work, we make time to pray and to celebrate Mass. Every day we worship God.

As a driver, I meet so many people who are serving refugees. We understand each other easily because what they talk about is my life. Daily I learn from them not to lose hope and to surrender everything to God.

Our office supports other regions of JRS too and I am always involved. When people arrive in Nairobi, whether very early or late, I am at the airport to meet them, the first to welcome them. I enjoy that, no matter the time, because they are in the field, making so many refugees happy. I have met people from all over the world.

In March 2003, I received an unexpected decision from UNHCR that seemed unfair. I felt sad, disappointed and alone. But JRS staff shared this time with me, they encouraged and prayed with me, and looked for ways to help me. It was a very hard time but for God everything is possible, and I found peace again.

Refugees suffer from homesickness. It nearly drove me mad at first, but the problem was solved when I started to work with JRS: God has given me a family, workmates, brothers and sisters.

*Yohannes Kebede  
JRS Eastern Africa*



## IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

JRS

In early January 2003 I celebrated the Eucharist in a village called Olujobo, one of the 44 villages of the Rhino camp refugee settlement. There were 18 chapels scattered over a settlement of 25,000 people, primarily Sudanese refugees. The liturgy was typically full of booming singing and dancing, even more so since it would be a long time before I returned again. On my return to the JRS compound I gave two catechists, Luate and Asega, a ride to their home village, Wanyange. The afternoon was hot as the three of us arrived; it was the dry season, the dust blowing into our faces and leaking into our clothes.

Asega and Luate embraced me. This was it. I was leaving. Both men are young, smart, fluent in several languages and deeply religious, two of my best catechists. In another world where a Sudan civil war might not have disrupted their lives, they could have been physicians or lawyers or university professors or business men. Luate is 31 years old and father of three. He had quickly gathered his wife, children and elderly mother four years earlier and fled the hostilities. In the barrenness of the surroundings he held me at arm's length, looked at me intently and promised to carry on the work of the Church in my absence. He was grateful that JRS and the Jesuits had allowed me to come to serve and accompany and advocate for the people. His face was transparent and gentle, his words clear and direct: *We will carry on and the African Church will go forward; you have been a great gift to us. Your presence is a testimony that the world has not forgotten us.* It was a moment to live for and live by.

As I was heading back to the JRS compound reflecting on the final Wanyange embraces and the excitement of the bittersweet liturgy of Olujobo, I thought of what the people I served had taught me. I had learned a raw and sinewy trust in God in a situation where everything could and often did go wrong, where poverty and malnutrition were part of every day and where life was at best fragile and uncertain. They taught me that in Africa, for all its breathtaking wealth and grinding poverty, there survives the inner force of the human spirit. I learned that their faith embraced the Church, in spite of its weaknesses and warts, and that the Church finds its meaning and

purpose in Christ's fundamental message: human beings are made in the image of God and the least of our brothers and sisters are to be the focus of the best expressions of love. It was among the Luates and Asegas that I saw more clearly the size and power of the Society's mandate to itself: the poor are our preferential option and they hold the key to understanding who we are and what we can be.

I have received many gifts as a Jesuit. The daunting time with the refugees has been the greatest. They are the reason why I hope to return to JRS. The Society's commitment to the world's millions of refugees is one of the finest things we can say for ourselves.

*Gary Smith SJ*  
*JRS Uganda*

## TOGETHER WE FOUND SOLUTIONS

The beginnings of JRS in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are closely linked to the daily life of a small Jesuit parish in Kindele, a suburb of Kinshasa.

Neglected by the authorities, the neighbourhood is often left to fend for itself. In 1995, worried about recurring land erosion, the parish priest turned to the youths of Kindele for help rather than to the state. All the parish committees were involved in his awareness and action strategy, which enabled Kindele to cope with the ensuing rainy season.

Belonging to a shared cause gave rise to a desire to work for the common good and to serve others. In 2000, the parish priest of Kindele was appointed Regional Director of JRS Grands Lacs. Starting out in his post, he could think of nothing better than to appeal to those with whom he had defied nature.

When a JRS project started in Kinshasa the following year, it was manned by Kindele parishioners. A doctor, a jurist and an engineer were designated to coordinate activities in three sites for 4,000 people who had been displaced by war or were widows and orphans of former military servicemen. We organised services on a voluntary basis, in much the same way as we would a parish activity. None of us had ever worked in the humanitarian sector before; our only experience came from what we had learned in Kindele about mobilising people to take matters into their hands.

What were we going to do? The needs were huge and we had little to give. But yes, we had something: above all, we had our time. We quickly got in with the crowd. We organized refresher courses to get a teaching corps going, and threw ourselves into preparing stew for malnourished children. Only much later did we realize how a project director has more to occupy him sitting at a desk with a computer than in a classroom facing children eager to learn. However, despite administrative jobs which kept us in town, we spent most of our time on site, listening to people talk about their problems and their desires. And together, we found solutions.

Meanwhile, other projects for war displaced people were set up in DRC. In 2005, when four projects closed, my thoughts went out to families as they prepared to return to the provinces they had fled. They unanimously expressed their gratitude to JRS, saying *we will never forget you*.

We were not the only organisation among them, nor were we the most powerful. What was so special in what we did, other than our constant presence with our brothers and sisters? I realised that the 'big' experience I had sought so much in my service to refugees was above all to be with them, not to look down on them from high above like someone gazing into a zoo. Each of these people has the breath of God: the same dignity as any other person in the world.

As in Kindele, I saw how the involvement of the entire refugee community was vital to taking up the challenge to serve, accompany and advocate. The worth of the refugees' contribution makes them protagonists in this service just as much as we JRS workers are.

*Victor Wilondja*  
*JRS Democratic Republic of Congo*

## BUILDERS OF GOD'S KINGDOM

JRS

I have always felt the best way of making Jesus Christ visible is by allowing them to experience his kindness, solidarity, devotion and his love through me. We need to bring more than solutions, money, or food; first and foremost we must convey the assurance that we are interested in the other person as a human being, regardless of who he/she is.

It is the life of Jesus Christ which drives my commitment to people who have left everything to save their lives. I try to follow his example of wisdom and especially of his great capacity to love.

My service has always been guided by question marks, chiefly: What would Jesus do in this situation? How can we better serve people who are victims of cruelty? How can we restore their self confidence as free and gifted human beings, and their dignity as children of God? How can we help them feel that, in spite of everything, there is a being who loves them and who is manifest in the kindness of others?

The JRS mandate of accompanying, serving and defending displaced people has a special significance for me in terms of faith experience: it sums up the potential to live for others. As an organisation that believes in people with all its heart, JRS is willing to take risks to help the displaced reconstruct lives of dignity amid their difficulties.

The right working style must be developed to give the best possible service. Commitment to JRS calls for something more than a professional title or the need for a job. When working for human dignity, openness and sensitivity are called for, as well as a sense of meaning and the ability to reflect on daily experiences and to take decisions.

Our work with displaced people in Barrancabermeja is exhausting. The area has seen much unrest in Colombia's civil war. Sometimes the reality, and our analysis of it, obliges us to admit that *there is nothing that we can do*: there is nothing to be done in the face of those who are in positions of economic or political power and who maintain the status quo against other communities.

This total impotence could lead to distress and most heartbreakingly, to despair and hopelessness. I would find it impossible to persevere happily each day if I did not believe in the existence of God and in the ability, deep within each of us, to transform our personal and communal history. This gives me hope and encourages me to continue struggling and believing that small miracles are achieved at every moment.

The goals of JRS Colombia are rooted in the Gospel concept of justice as we work so all may enjoy their full rights and freedoms. My colleagues and I often contemplate the dream of building a community where there is enough room for all, a place we can call the Kingdom of God. I feel I have found refuge in an organisation which does this as its institutional apostolate.

Every day, as I get up and walk to work, I am aware that each of my activities is necessary for the Kingdom to be realised. I am a builder in JRS: my commitment to the Gospel is a commitment to build an organisation based on justice, with an impetus to reach out to displaced people, to demand their rights, and to give and receive support and solidarity.

*Ledys Bohorquez Farfan*  
*JRS Colombia*

## DISCOVERING LIFE'S PURPOSE



In the Gospels, we find key passages which reveal the priorities in the Lord's heart. One such text is chapter 13 (1-17) of St John's Gospel. Jesus knows the time has come for him to accept the consequences of his way of life. It is time to make a gesture that will epitomise his whole existence, a gesture to sum up 33 years of love, a definitive expression of what he was: love, boundless love.

Let us meditate this text together, first by **reading** it through. When we finish, we **ask** God: *Lord, help us to feel your love for us so we may be able to serve those around us as you would have.*

Meditating the text, the first step is to **imagine** the Gospel scene and to make myself present, to feel I am part of the group of Jesus' disciples. Together with other men and women, I belong to his circle of friends, those he loves without limit.

The second step is to **see** what Jesus does. This time, Jesus does not choose to perform a miracle, although he did many throughout his life. Neither does he choose to say new parables or to make a speech. He opts for a symbolic act: *Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself (Jn 13:3-4).* He pours water into a jug and does a job usually reserved for slaves, a ritual of welcome, of purification. When the time comes to show his infinite love, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. We see the Source of Life, he who the universe cannot contain, the Almighty, becoming a servant. God kneels on the floor at the feet of man to serve him.

The third step is to **listen to what Jesus says**: *Unless I wash you, you have no share with me (Jn 13:8).* Authentic service starts when we accept that others may serve us. If we want to serve, first we must learn how to receive. Other passages remind us of this: *For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mk 10:42-46) that they may have life, and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10), even if he has to die like the grain of wheat that falls into the earth (Jn 12:24).* When Jesus finishes washing his apostles' feet, he asks them: *Do you understand what I, the Master, have done to you? It is an example I have given you. What I have done to you, do to others... By knowing this and putting it into practice, you will be happy.*

## *Reflection*

Contemplating what we have seen and heard, let us seek to apply it to our lives. Fr Pedro Arrupe founded JRS 25 years ago, rather like the Lord towards the end of his life, when his time was near. Fr Arrupe offered the Society of Jesus, almost like a testament, his secret to attain happiness: serving the poorest, the refugees. It was both the fruit and the synthesis of his life.

Countless volunteers have testified that while serving JRS, they were convinced they were *doing what they had to do and being where they had to be*. And they felt happy doing to others what the Lord would have done.

Despite natural tensions and difficulties in JRS teams – where people of different backgrounds and contrasting personalities live together in poor, insecure surroundings – members are happy because they *find the meaning of life through giving themselves to others*. The suffering of others draws out what is best in them; they see it as an enduring invitation to do their utmost so that those who weep may have dignity and life.

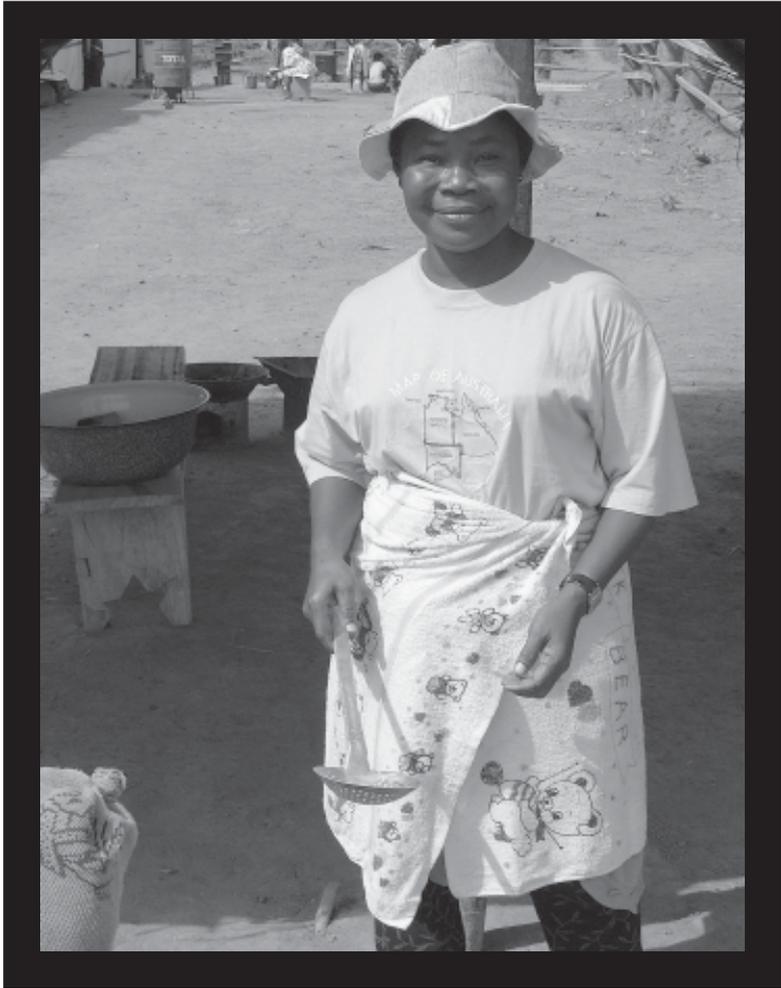
All this is lived as a marvellous and unexpected gift, as a sunrise which comes as a surprise, so much so that we ask ourselves who is serving who, who is enriching who?

As we serve, we discover the seductive paradoxes inherent in the Gospel: a grain of wheat falls into the earth, dies and bears much fruit; the poor are raised on high while the powerful are brought down; life is gained by giving it to others; wine is offered to drink so there will be feasting, joy and hope; salt is diluted to give life flavour; the candle melts to create Light, and on the Wood of the Cross blossom the buds of the Resurrection.

## *Prayer*

We end our prayer by conversing with the Lord, as a friend talks to a friend. We open our heart to him, expressing our thanksgivings and intentions. We may close by reciting the Lord's Prayer or any other.

*Mateo Aguirre SJ  
JRS West Africa*



Ken Gavin SJ/JRS

*Suggested texts for further biblical  
contemplation about service*

- Mark 6:30-44
- Luke 10:25-37



## SERVING WITH THE EYES AND HEART OF LOVE



### *Everything starts with an encounter*

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in an absolute and final way.

*What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, what you know... what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything (Pedro Arrupe SJ).*

These words say much about the spirituality of Fr Arrupe. I think it is the gift he would have desired for all those who became members of JRS, the organisation he founded. Based in the tradition of the Catholic faith, the primary source of inspiration for JRS is Jesus Christ and the Gospel. The spiritual legacy of Ignatius of Loyola, the first Jesuit, guided Fr Arrupe and is reflected in the documents of the organisation and in many of its members.

In 2005 the spirituality of JRS is expressed in the lives of the people who belong to it now. People from many different backgrounds, cultures and faiths join JRS. They bring with them experiences from their past, their partly formed world views, the prayers or words of wisdom they have learnt, the religious practices they have followed or abandoned, their gifts, their own hopes and joys, grief and anxieties.

Many come very highly motivated to accompany, serve, and plead the cause of refugees. Others join for a cross-cultural experience or an adventure or a gap year, or to have a job. Through JRS they see first-hand what people who are displaced by war and oppression experience. They see people robbed of family, homes and land. They see people starving for food and starving for the right to live in dignity as free men

and women. They see injustice of different kinds, as great as genocide and as petty as a bureaucracy that denies people the right to family visits.

Many are profoundly changed, their world views turned upside down. The rightness of their home countries' policies is challenged. Loyalty and patriotism take on new meanings. In farewell celebrations, many members of JRS say *I will never be the same again*. Their spirituality, enriched by new experiences, their reflection and response, has grown and changed.

***I will never be  
the same again.***

The spirituality we find in JRS stems then from a living, growing encounter with people, particularly displaced people, and an encounter with God. God is questioned, argued with and implored for strength and help. God is found rejoicing in the birth of a new baby, in the smiles of children, exulting when the refugees are glad. God is there weeping when loved ones are killed and children starve.

This inspires an inner motivation and a challenge to help build the world that God desires. Sometimes this world can be encapsulated in a small space in a refugee camp where people experience love. The people of JRS see the enormity of the problem. They know they cannot fix it all, but they take small steps *right there right now*. As our young JRS associate, Song Kosal urges: *We can do one thing every day to make peace grow like the lotus flower.*

Spirituality in JRS is a way of seeing and responding to the world with the eyes and heart of love. It is a dialogue with the One who stirs us to love. Most members of JRS are Christian so the life and words of Jesus are the background to their spirituality. Members who belong to the Buddhist, Islam or other faiths know the Source of Love and life through different channels. Our Jewish connection reminds us that God dwells among us. Refugees too come from diverse religious traditions and the JRS member seeks to discover shared goodness and insights to create a just and merciful world.

What are some of the words, images and experiences of JRS that we can use to describe this spirituality in service, this way of seeing and responding to the world that love calls us to? Here are some as I see them:

## *The first experience: the cross*

Sadly, suffering is a very strong part of the refugee experience. Years ago when asked why I wanted to join JRS I found myself spontaneously echoing the words of Karl Rahner: *Whenever suffering is present in the world there the cross of Christ is mysteriously present and I want to be there.* Mateo Aguirre seemed to have the same feeling when he wrote: *The call of those who suffer is the driving force behind our presence here in the Grands Lacs region. We are children of the same Father; they are my brothers and sisters. They are also victims of the greed and manipulation of those who struggle to gain power. Commitment is tiring and stressful. We must live it in the light of this mystery because, from a human perspective, it makes little sense. What gives me strength is love beyond death.*

The wounded heart of Africa drew Amaya Valcárcel to write: *I spent a few days in Burundi some months ago. Although brief, the visit shook me as I was faced*

*with the stark reality of people's capacity for the extremes of good and evil. Images of children wounded by machetes flash before my eyes followed by the recollection of others frantically drinking water after walking for days to reach a feeding centre. But what really struck me was the strong determination to rise above circumstances, however tragic they may be.*

The resilience of the human spirit is what we see and admire so much in refugees we come to know and it seeps into our own spirituality. Writing from her experience in Liberia, Jenny Cafiso said: *I was very surprised at the answer to my simple question 'How are you?' People living in very inhumane conditions replied: 'I thank God'.* As Jenny reflected that night, she says she too thanked God that the human spirit is able to emerge from brutality and inhumanity with strength, joy and hope.

**Whenever suffering is present in the world there the cross of Christ is mysteriously present and I want to be there.**

## *The second experience: accompanying through presence and friendship*

Seeing the face of Christ in each person we meet is the promise of the Gospel (cf. Mt 25:31-46). To see the face of Christ in every refugee is part of the JRS spiritual journey for each Christian. Other may simply say they acknowledge the dignity and the precious gift of each human person.

In the hurly burly of every day, among hundreds of people who cross our paths, this is not always obvious or immediate. But in the quiet reflective moments before sleep or in the early morning, in shared Eucharistic celebrations, the face of Jesus comes back to haunt us, surprise us or smile at us. We find that as we moved to respond to people's needs, our hearts were indeed burning within us. They ignite into flames as we remember the encounter.

Accompaniment calls for a listening, discerning heart. At its best it is exquisite sensitivity to the real need expressed by the other. One image that remains etched in my mind forever is the frail body of Yi Yi in a swimming pool, supported in the arms of a former International Director of JRS. Yi Yi, a Burmese refugee medical student was dying of cancer. Wasted in body, unable to move by herself but strong in spirit, she wanted to go swimming a few days before her death, to feel the joy of water touching, cleaning her whole body.

The picture of Mark and Yi Yi laughing in delight as water splashed over her speaks not only of tenderness and fidelity to the end but also of the ability to respond to what many might have dismissed with a sympathetic smile as impossible or impractical.

Another beautiful response is found in a story from Cambodia. A father whose child had just died suddenly, came to visit the JRS house in tears. Crippled by a landmine, he sat huddled on our stairs, his crutch propped up beside him. Sroey, a Buddhist driver, and two students, Mony and Vinay saw his need. They quickly threw off their clothes, donned Cambodian *kromas* and began to gather wood gently. I sat beside the distraught man contemplating the scene. Slowly

he lifted his head, saw them at work building a small coffin and smiled his gratitude. I remember the incident vividly after 14 years. Love was in that place and I knew it was God.

Just last week, I saw willingness to walk the last mile, to give without counting the cost, in one young Dutch volunteer, a Catholic but certainly not a person of pious words or religious pretensions. After hours of hard work and frustrated by unjust decisions, she found time to get up early on her day off to buy a wedding cake and to turn a drab refugee site into a joyous wedding banquet for the new couple and the rest of the refugee population. I am sure God danced with them all! (cf. Zep 3:14-17).



JRS Asia Pacific

## *The third experience: service*

JRS spirituality is a spirituality of service. Love is shown in deeds, wrote Ignatius of Loyola (SpEx 230). People do not want a word of friendship, a comforting hug, a doctor, or a cup of water after a committee meeting to decide the procedures for giving it. They need it now. Creativity, flexibility and immediacy of response are gifts the Spirit of God can evoke in us, just as the need of the other evokes mercy and compassion in us.

A spirituality of welcome calls JRS people to open their hearts and homes to receive the gift of each one and to give of themselves in return. This is a challenge. Sometimes we are overwhelmed with numbers, with crowds of thousands or even a crowd of 20. We ask for strength and for trust that God will call other friends to meet the need.

True service is marked by fidelity. Pierre Ceyrac, who is close to 90 years old, used to be seen driving his old pick-up truck into refugee camps as the shining four-wheel drive vehicles of the UN drove out because of lack of security. *Unguided missile*, they snorted of him. He was quite the opposite! His strength, motivation, love and ability to strive for the impossible dream with joy was obviously guided by the Holy Spirit.

Vicente Romero, a journalist who describes himself as agnostic, once said: *I do not believe in pious rhetoric or high flown vision statements but when I see JRS people in places where everyone else has left, that I believe.*

Service born of encountering and accompanying people calls for a spirit which encompasses the following:

### *A spirit of communion*

To serve, JRS people from many nationalities and different backgrounds live in teams, big and small. This is bound to be complicated. Some personalities inevitably clash. However people are challenged to accept the difference of the other and to rejoice in the richness of diversity.

Beneath the surface of differences of opinions, of minor 'JRS domestics' over cars or keys or food, or forgetting to tell people things, there is a deep communion of spirit about the ultimate mission of accompanying and serving the refugees and advocating for their rights. This spirit becomes most palpable in times of crisis. We even have cases of people willing to lay down their lives for others. In many groups, communion beyond difference is celebrated in the daily Eucharist.

In refugee and war torn situations like East Timor for instance, the Eucharist was a public symbol of the daily bread of the freedom struggle of an oppressed people. In other situations, refugees have celebrated the Eucharist as shells thundered into their homes and settlements. I remember Vincent Dierckx and Eve Lester engaging with the prison police so the Kurdish refugees could have Mass on Christmas day in the policeman's bedroom.

The centrality of the Eucharist in the life of JRS is discovered with *dearest, deep down freshness* as we look back over the past 25 years.

### *A spirit of reconciliation*

JRS workers are often called to serve in places where there is a crucial need for reconciliation: between groups of refugees and displaced people and those who displaced them, or between returnees and the receiving population. An authentic spirituality for a JRS worker should include an ability to say "I am sorry" and to forgive, and to find an inner peace which offers a healing presence.

### *An attitude of discernment*

Some people think of discernment as the intuitive response of a loving, praying heart. Others think of rules, of a process of logic coupled with prayer, of consolations and desolations. Most people deeply involved in JRS know a discerning heart is needed every day and at times, a more formal communal process is required.

Where in the world to intervene; what needs of which refugees to meet; how to serve: all are decision points. Hollenbeck named some priorities when claims are in conflict and they can help us decide: *The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich, the freedom of the dominated over the liberty of the powerful, the participation of marginalized groups over the preservation of an order that excludes them.*

### ***Searching for justice***

To plead the cause of refugees, to advocate for their rights requires knowledge, courage, and a passion for justice. It also requires the humility to know that different tasks require different gifts, sometimes the gifts of the whole international team. It requires perseverance and the capacity to cope with failure. It requires a just anger but not fanaticism.

As the landmines campaign taught us, we must ban the landmines in our hearts as well as the landmines in the ground.

Probably more than anything we need generosity to encourage one another, refugees and JRS members alike as we struggle to understand causes, sinful structures, self-interest and to identify solutions that empower. Sometimes we just need to take a rest and trust that providence will find a way.

### ***Hoping against hope (Rom 4:18)***

The biblical image most often used to describe the refugee experience is that of exile and repatriation. *For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile (Jer 29:11-14).*

*There is no better gift which can be given to people in exile than the hope of peace,* wrote Miriam, a refugee from Africa. To take away a person's hope is a dreadful thing for without hope, the human spirit dies. To do all we can to keep hope alive for one another, to be grateful for the smallest gifts of each day, to add the spice of joy to life in exile: such are the tasks God entrusts to us.

God dwelling in us pours forth hope, love and joy from our hearts.

*Denise Coghlan RSM  
Jesuit Service Cambodia*



Amaya Valcárcel/JRS

## Chapter 4

# SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH JESUS' EYES

## Defending refugees

*Our love for refugees cannot be separated from our concern for justice. Love implies a concrete and absolute demand for justice, that is, recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbour.*

Miriam Wairimu, Kenya



## GIVING WHAT I HAVE RECEIVED

As a refugee, I was deeply touched by a Jesuit who accompanied me on my horrible journey when I was detained by the Immigration services.

During that time, his accompaniment was like balm for my wounds; I knew I was not alone, that somebody cared about me. He lifted my spirit and taught me I could serve others even in my times of suffering, and that my spirit was free. He was for me like Simon of Cyrene, helping to carry my cross when I was ready to fall down in despair and frustration.

I learned to suffer with a smile, and I tried to lift those who were down, because through helping others I found the true meaning of my incarceration. The seed was planted and six months after my release, I felt I was ready to give back what I had received.

I joined the JRS team in Los Angeles and started serving those who, in my eyes, make up the most vulnerable population in the US: undocumented immigrants and refugees. I accompanied minors who were arrested by Immigration services as they tried to find their families residing in the US. Some had been left behind in their native country when their parents came here to escape war, poverty or persecution. Others had no family and were living in extreme poverty, so they decided to come to this country in search of a better future.

None of them expected to be arrested and treated as criminals, much less to end up in jail. It was so hard for me to see them in tears saying, *I'm not a bad person, I haven't killed anyone. Why am I in jail? I just wanted to be with my mother and reunited with my family.*

When I visited these children, I had nothing to offer them except my eyes to look upon them with love and compassion, my shoulder to cry on, my hands to dry their tears, my voice to talk about God's love and hope, my arms to hug and comfort them, and my ears to listen to their incredible stories of courage and struggle during their journey to the land of promise.

I saw myself in these children. I understood their fear of the unknown, their pain in seeing their dreams cut down and in the bitter taste of defeat. Undocumented immigrants or refugees are not criminals; we merely have a burden imposed on us, and we ask for the opportunity for a better future.

JRS advocated for minors' rights in detention: we knocked on so many doors to appeal for a change in policy. It took some time but today, minors are no longer detained in jail and we hope they will never be treated like criminals again. They are now placed in shelters while they await the outcome of their immigration procedures.

What a great victory!

*Amalia Molina Guzman*  
*JRS United States*



## HAIL MARY: EDUCATING REFUGEE WOMEN



When I decided to undertake advocacy for women's education, I analysed gender roles in my home country, Liberia, and in Lainé refugee camp in Guinea.

My analysis can be summed up as follows: women are the mainstay of their families as well as peacemakers during war. They are caretakers and teachers of their children; the running of the home is left to them, even if husband and wife work the same hours. They are well able to analyse root causes of tension and they know which power groups in the community are most likely to support peace initiatives. However, women are the least among decision-makers both at home and in wider society, where they only rarely hold higher posts.

Women should have equal rights and the same degree of representation as men. Development of their potential at all levels should be a priority, and their capacity should be enhanced in areas where their weaknesses are greatest. Education is crucial to empower women: to promote equality, to increase their participation in decision-making, and to reduce violence against them.

Women should have access to higher education as a right, not merely as an advantage. But not nearly enough has been done about this, so we must continue to demand this right. Martin Luther King once wrote from prison: *Freedom is never given by oppressors; it must be demanded by the oppressed.*

As a Christian, my prayer and my faith give me strength to advocate for us refugee women. One of the prayers I recite daily is the Hail Mary. When Mary was blessed, the child of her womb was also blessed. I believe when God blesses women, others are blessed too. This supports my belief that if women are educated, others will benefit too: in their home, in the community, and in the nation. Indeed, it has been said that if you educate a man you educate an individual; if you educate a woman you educate a nation.

I am also much encouraged by the Gospel passage about the wedding at Cana (Jn 2: 1-11). Jesus' mother, Mary, was at a wedding feast in the town of Cana in Galilee, attended also by her son and his disciples. The wine finished. We may think Jesus should never have let that happen in the first place, but perhaps he allowed the couple to run out of wine because he wanted his mother to advocate for them.

And Mary, serving as advocate, turned to the servants and said: *Do whatever he tells you.* Jesus told the servants to bring water which he changed to wine, and everyone was happy. The transformation of water to wine was the first miracle Jesus ever performed. It was here that he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

I believe this miracle may never have taken place, and the wedding would have been a failure, if Mary had not advocated. This gives me strength to persist in advocating on behalf of people in need.

*Mrs Wubu  
JRS Guinea*

## FINDING THE STRENGTH TO RECOVER



When I arrived in Italy from Algeria, I was told to go immediately to the police headquarters to ask for refugee status. I did so. I explained myself in signs because no one understood French. They referred me to a reception centre run by the Municipality of Rome. I felt completely lost, I was in a dark corridor but I did not know where it led to. I walked and walked without knowing where I was going, I was a robot in a completely new world among people I could not communicate with. I trusted no one.

After a month, I spent a week in hospital following an attack of acute appendicitis. No one came to see if I was dead or alive, and I wore the same underclothes all the time, because I had no change of linen. When I recovered and returned to the reception centre, the man in charge showed me a newspaper advert and told me I could go to work as a maid. I told him I had not come to Italy to do such work. No one ever proposed I should learn Italian. How could I work if I was unable to understand what I was told?

It was only after some months in Italy that I came to know about Centro Astalli [JRS Italy]. I went there immediately. At the police headquarters, they have no time to give information, they only have time to shout and treat people badly. Centro Astalli was a revelation! People understand your situation without asking questions, they welcome you and that's that. There, at last, I started to come out of my dark tunnel. I had become very weak, without any force of will to react to anything, but at Centro Astalli I found the strength to recover. I met people who could speak French and even those who could not were somehow close to me. I enrolled in a school to learn Italian and slowly started to rebuild my life.

My interview for refugee status was sheer torture: I found myself face-to-face with a wall of incomprehension and ignorance. The interviewers asked many questions about my story. I answered as best I could, but I could see they thought I was making everything up. I tried to explain how in Algeria many people had been killed before my eyes just because they had a journalist's pass card, as I did. When

I said two girls had been shot in the playground of my daughter's school, which faced the district office for national security, they replied that in Italy, people stole cars from in front of police stations. These people clearly had not even read the newspapers to find out what was happening in Algeria.

I could defend myself because I had a certain level of education. I found myself thinking about all the people, especially women, who would not have known how to answer back. Perhaps their application for refugee status would have been rejected, and they would have ended up in even worse trouble.

Eventually, I attended a course to become a "cultural mediator", a new type of social worker who helps newly arrived immigrants at the police headquarters or in hospital. This was precisely the kind of help I needed so badly at the start. It gives me great satisfaction to do this beautiful work now.

*Salih*  
*JRS Italy*

## GOD'S WORK HAS NO BORDERS

RS

Work with refugee applicants at the Asylum Seekers Centre in Sydney daily reminds me of my childhood Bible stories. In today's language, Mary and Joseph fleeing with Jesus would be asylum seekers. If Egypt had the strict controls Australia has now, I wonder if they would have been able to prove their need for protection. If those early refugees arrived in 21st century Australia, they would be taken to prison, otherwise known as 'immigration detention'. Or they would be turned away at the border. If they were fleeing the Middle East, they would most likely be Muslim, and perhaps unable to speak English. They would need support as they struggle to survive the refugee determination process.

My work provides me with an opportunity to live biblical writings as an all-inclusive text, according to my interpretation that ALL people are my brothers and sisters regardless of race or creed. To Matthew's question, *Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?* Jesus replies: *Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.* As Christians, we are asked to love one another, yet many support the notion of turning people back from our borders.

The refugees I meet are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and from all other beliefs or none. It may be religious persecution that causes them to flee. My role is to accompany, to advocate and to serve, not to persecute further. A spirit permeates my daily work. Is it the Holy Spirit of my biblical text, or a presence of the spirit, even more inclusive, that dwells in every human being?

My daily work is a spiritual journey. I have the chance to walk humbly with those who have the courage to flee for their lives. I wonder if I would have the courage to keep going after each rejection that refugee applicants face, first in their own countries where they would prefer to live safely with their families, and then here, in Australia, where public opinion is against them. They often tell me of torture they have endured. The stories of man's inhumanity to man remind me of the cruelty committed against Jesus in his passion and death.

*En Shallah*, says my gentle man from Iraq, praying to God that he will one day see his family again. *God willing*, I repeat. We walk a parallel journey. I receive more than I give in working with refugees. They teach me about love, courage, determination and hope. And, because I know Sydney and its services, I advocate for a bed, a meal, for work or for legal assistance. Each time I ask, I hope my plea will be responded to with kindness. So it often is.

When everything seems unbelievably difficult, there is a flash of light in the darkness, a moment when good prevails – or is it God? Whatever it is, it sustains me, and I come back for another day.

My work is a gift for which I am enormously grateful. It is a constant reminder that we are all equal in God's sight and that God's work has no borders.

*Sylvia Winton  
JRS Australia*

## LEARNING TO FORGIVE

JRS

Asylum seekers in Malta are detained for long months in very tough conditions. As a lawyer, I offer them information, advice and legal assistance and I lobby for improved protection procedures.

My work pitches me against the forces that shape government policy in the field of immigration. This has made me sharply aware of my powerlessness, that is, my true place in the larger scheme of things. It has brought home the painful realisation that often there is little or nothing I can do to ease detainees' suffering. This is hard to accept, so hard that at times I am tempted to give up, to turn away from the pain and to live more comfortably.

The attitudes of some detainees do not help. They range from a misplaced belief that JRS workers can achieve miracles, to hostility and mistrust. For people who feel confused, angry and helpless, manipulated by some and ignored by others, it is not easy to take people at face value and to trust them. It may also be hard to accept that, like them, we are human and weak and we have our limitations: sometimes they want a saviour, not support.

Often, the only thing that keeps me going is the image of Mary at the foot of the cross. I am sure she must have been dying to tear Jesus off the cross, to do something for him, but she was helpless. The only thing she could do was to be there, so there she stayed, although it must have been the most difficult thing she ever had to do.

Like Mary, being there is often all I can offer, and I have realised that this presence is precious. More than that, it is a source of many blessings. Just as *streams of living water* flowed from the cross of Christ, the detainees have been a never-ending source of enrichment for me.

I am constantly humbled by their faith in the face of adversity, their hope in a God who is with them no matter what. I can never forget one Muslim woman who had experienced terrible persecution. Faced with yet another trial just when she thought she would find safety, she assured me I should not worry, because *my God takes care of me always*.

Perhaps the most profound lesson the detainees taught me is how to forgive. In January 2005, we went to celebrate Sunday mass in a detention centre just days after 80 detainees were brutally beaten by soldiers for staging a peaceful protest. Mass is celebrated in one of the dormitories, in the corridor between the beds. All those present that Sunday had been injured – some had broken bones, others stitches to the head. The room looked like a field hospital. Before the celebrant could even open his mouth, one detainee with his arm in plaster stood up and turned to the rest, urging them to forgive and to pray for those who had hurt them. I was moved to tears by his heartfelt words. God was so tangibly present in that room, in some ways a far cry from the ornate churches dotted around Malta.

Being close to asylum seekers in detention has totally changed my life perspective. Above all, my work has taught me about the love of God. It has instilled in me a certainty that, no matter how little my efforts may achieve, if they are part of God's plan, some good will come out of them even if I never get to see it.

*Katrine Camilleri  
JRS Malta*



## MY JOURNEY WITH REFUGEES

My journey with refugees began in 1970 when I volunteered to work with Bangladeshi refugees as a scholastic. This exposure enkindled in me a deep concern for these helpless people who had become 'nobodies' through no fault of their own. An outbreak of cholera, claiming 17 people in one day, remains a vivid memory even after 35 years.

When Fr Pedro Arrupe announced the birth of the JRS on 14 November 1980, my experience with Bangladeshi refugees 10 years earlier rang a bell. In 1992, as Provincial of India, I revived JRS South Asia. In 1995, I was present at the 34th General Congregation which reaffirmed the contribution of JRS in different parts of the world after 15 years of service, appealing to *all the Provinces to support the Jesuit Refugee Service in every possible way* (GC34, no.16). My interest in the cause of refugees grew deeper, leading to my decision to spend a sabbatical year (1998) with the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

I extended my stay for a year to consolidate initiatives JRS had launched to build up leadership among the refugees, before taking up my next mission in Rajasthan. After three years I was asked to return to Nepal to work among the Bhutanese refugees again.

With my long years of administrative experience in the Society, I could have found myself in other satisfying and more comfortable jobs. Why then am I in the midst of refugees? My presence stems from a firm conviction which has grown in me through years of personal contact with my Lord and master, Jesus Christ, who had compassion for helpless, hungry people without a shepherd. Jesus did something concrete when faced with challenges. He fed the hungry, made sure there would be leaders, and that they would carry on his mission. Jesus, a man of conviction, had firm faith in his Father's love for him and for all his creatures. Jesus' option for the poor did not stop with his word, he showed it in action.

My loving mother had already sown in me seeds of compassion, love for the poor and a resolve for hard work. My life experiences culti-

vated these good seeds, enabling them to take root and produce fruit: my long years of training in the Society, interaction with Jesuits and non Jesuits of all ages, as well as exposure to tough realities like poverty and drought in Bihar, the slums in Delhi and the refugee camps of West Bengal.

It has been my constant endeavour to see the crucified Lord in the faces of suffering 'nameless' refugees. This may explain why I feel comfortable to accompany refugees, why I put my heart and soul into raising funds to carry out a quality education programme for them, and why I spend hours writing letters and articles or giving interviews to journalists to advocate their cause.

Today the Bhutanese refugees – their leadership, thousands of youths empowered through our education programme, and the entire community – appreciate my presence among them. They all know I am with them for their sake and not to build a kingdom for myself.

*Varkey Perekatt SJ*  
*JRS Nepal*

JRS Grands Lacs



## TAKE MY PEOPLE OUT OF EGYPT



Those who serve, or have served the world's population of millions of displaced people and refugees are called to persevere in creating conditions in which all may enjoy their full rights and have access to the riches accrued by mankind throughout the years.

We are called to make known what takes place in refugee camps. With this in mind, I invite you to use the following guidelines to meditate as a group on the biblical text describing the vocation of Moses (Exod 3:1-10). The same strategy could also be adopted for individual meditation.

- 1. Preparing for prayer:** Some members of the team invite the rest to be aware of where you are, what you do and who you serve. It might help to use a map, so everyone can show where they come from, as well as the regions of origin of displaced people. Close to the country or region you want to highlight, you may light a candle.
- 2. Expressing what you want:** One of you speaks in the name of all, offering an introductory prayer in which he asks the Lord to give you *the right words to tell the world about the suffering, injustice and death in refugee camps and settlements for displaced people, so that people who decide about structural matters – arms, trade, access to medicines, technology – may become aware of the criminal impact of decisions when based on the welfare of a few.*
- 3. Reading the biblical text:** After reading the text through twice, the person leading the prayer distributes a list of the following points, inviting all to use them to meditate the text.
- 4. First point:** Contemplate Moses who discovers a phenomenon: a flame that does not consume, and who *takes the decision to move closer to it: I must look at this great sight* (Exod 3:3).

- 5. Second point:** The voice of God can be heard by the one who goes closer to see: *I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob... I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt, I heard their cry... Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey* (Exod 3:7,8).
- 6. Third point:** Listen to God's call to Moses: *Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt* (Exod 3:10).
- 7. Personal prayer:** Each of you may now spend 10 or more minutes, depending on your surroundings, to pray over the text, reading it and turning to the three points for guidance. Music may help your meditation.
- 8. Sharing your prayer:** This time – for another 10 minutes or so – is an opportunity for you to share what each has discovered in your personal prayer.
- 9. Conclusion:** The meditation may be wrapped up with a song or a prayer, depending on the customs of the place where you are.

## *Reflection*

For those of us who have touched the tragedy of the forced migration of millions of people, it is no secret that decisions which provoke displacement often originate very far off from settlements of uprooted people in Nimule in southern Sudan; San Pablo in Colombia; Negage in Angola; Los Guadales in Dominican Republic, or Kudunabari in Nepal.

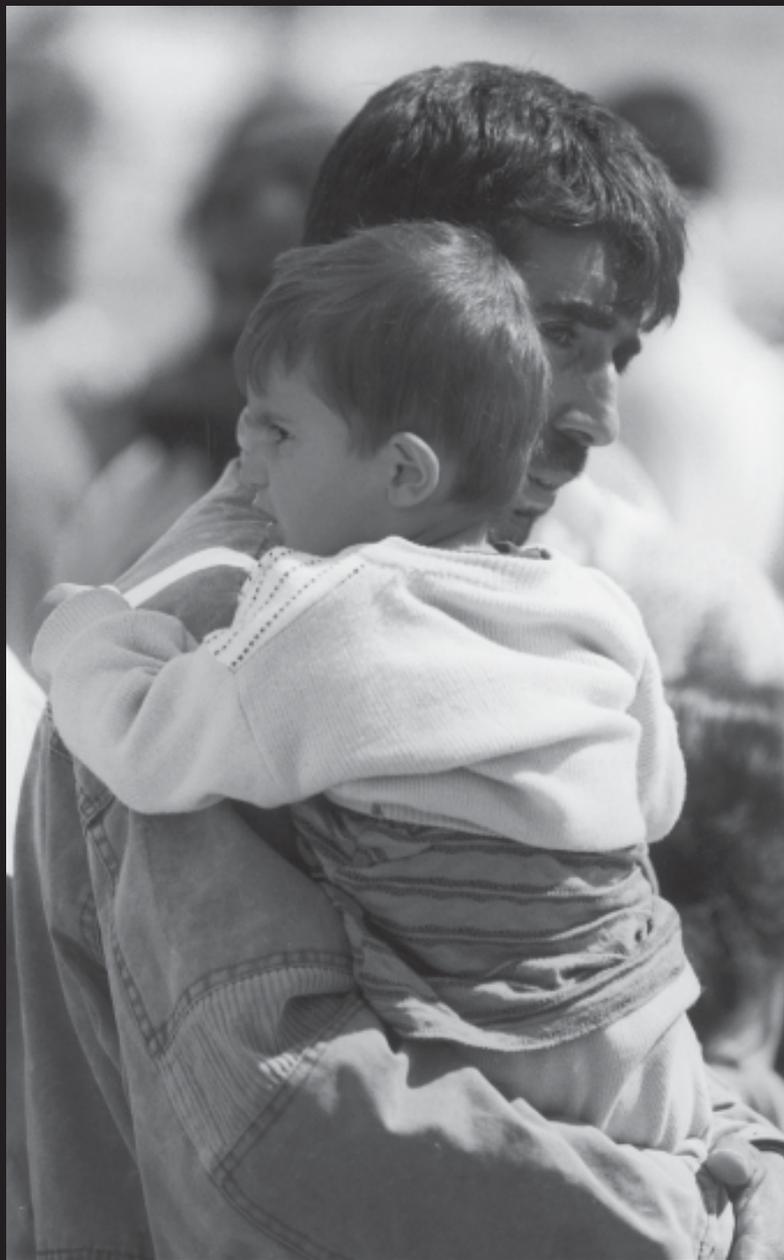
We are all aware what there is behind such movements of people: among other reasons, we find trade in diamonds, gold, petrol, palm oil plantations, contracts for managing water resources, and the construction of telecommunication lines. These are controlled by powerful people and structures which manipulate dictators; they serve them or manage their interests on the market.

As humanitarian workers, we are called to fulfil a crucial task, one we often forget: this is to be a prophetic voice reaching and touching the hearts of all men and women of goodwill everywhere on the planet, and to generate creative alternatives for justice and peace.

*Jorge Eduardo Serrano SJ*  
*JRS Colombia*

*Suggested texts for further biblical  
contemplation about defending  
the cause of refugees*

- **Mark 1: 40-45** Healing the leper
- **Mark 11: 15-19** Jesus in the temple
- **John 21: 15-19** The triple confession of Peter
- **1 Corinthians 2: 1-5**



# SPEAK OUT, JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY, DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AND NEEDY

Pr 31:9



Advocating the cause of refugees is a mission expressed through a multitude of activities: defending the rights of refugees with the local authorities; patiently and accurately collecting information about violations of human rights; denouncing abuses of refugees' human dignity and fostering what promotes respect towards them; lobbying national and international policy-makers for refugees; participating in international coalitions of non-governmental organisations, like those for the prohibition of antipersonnel landmines or against the use of child soldiers; undertaking serious research about the causes of forced displacement of peoples and proposing tentative solutions; sensitising public awareness about the plight of refugees; fighting xenophobia and racism...

What is common to all these actions? They go beyond mere assistance. They are not a band-aid, rather they aim at healing the wounds of exile. Above all, they seek to prevent fresh wounds. As Fr Kolvenbach told the JRS regional directors in 1997, advocating the cause of refugees *in an uncaring world ... is the most difficult part of your apostolate. A work of faith is a work for justice. (Everybody's Challenge, 77).*

This mission of JRS is clearly inscribed in the option made by the Society of Jesus for *a service of faith, of which promotion of justice is an absolute requirement (GC 32, d.4, no.2).*

The last General Congregation of the Society of Jesus stated: *The vision of justice which guides us is intimately linked with our faith. It is deeply rooted in the Scriptures, Church tradition, and our Ignatian heritage (GC 34, d.3, no.4).*

*Sustaining a commitment to seeking justice requires a robust spirituality, one that no one can maintain without continuous prayer, which gives meaning to his/her action, writes Mark Raper (EC, 113).* How can such a

spirituality influence and direct our commitment to advocate the cause of refugees? I suggest we travel this path in the following pages.

### *Rooted in accompaniment*

*To accompany, to serve and to advocate the cause.* The order in which these three actions of the JRS mission are listed reflects a fundamental intuition. Certainly they are mutually complementary and they make up one whole. But accompaniment comes first. It is by *being with* refugees that one discovers how to serve them. Similarly, accompanying refugees leads spontaneously to defending their cause. The value of our advocacy in favour of refugees does not reside primarily in our knowledge of what is politically at stake; rather, it arises out of our *knowing* in the biblical sense of the word, that is, concrete understanding *in flesh and in bone* of the world of refugees.

The priority of accompaniment is linked to the dynamics of incarnation which characterize Ignatian spirituality. The importance given to contemplation of the Incarnation in the Spiritual Exercises is well-known: we are guided by the perspective of *the great extent of the circuit of the world, with peoples so many and so diverse to the house and rooms of Our Lady, in the city of Nazareth in the province of Galilee* (SpEx 103). For Ignatius, the universal – the Kingdom, salvation – presents itself in the specific and concrete: a place, a person, a life. God can be sought and found in all things, and especially in the most simple, the most insignificant, because he inhabits them. Says Mark Raper, *every reality, every experience, every choice may turn out to be an occasion of grace. Even a refugee camp, with its in-built evils, can become an arena in which one finds the Lord through contemplation* (EC, 112-113).

As for us, are we not in a much better position to make the voice of refugees heard *by those who would prefer not to hear it* (P.H. Kolvenbach, 1997), we who have seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, and felt in our flesh the injustice they suffer? Today we experience this concretely in the fight JRS has taken up against policies of detention of asylum seekers and migrants. Is it not the reality of weekly visits by JRS teams to detention centres of men, women, children, all with a name and a face that gives weight to our demands?

In refugee camps, often situated on one side of the frontline, advocating is a more delicate matter. There is a risk that defending the rights of refugees will be interpreted by victims of war on the 'other side' as a stand taken 'against' them. And humanitarian organisations are very much concerned by the ideal of neutrality. However, if this ideal is overstressed, our advocacy may be in danger of losing its force as we attempt to keep out of the fray.

In the middle of the nineties, I was part of JRS projects in Rwandan refugee camps in Bukavu (eastern Democratic Republic of Congo). Becoming aware *a posteriori* of the way in which we progressively developed our activities, I realised that generously embracing the reality in the camps gave us a 'place' from where to expand our horizons, so as to reach out to all who were victims of violence in the region.

Former members of JRS Bukavu team wrote some two years later: *Our first steps in the camps were 'an application of the senses': to touch, to see, to hear, to taste the hardship of exile the refugees lived. Inevitably we would take in the image which the refugees, consciously or unconsciously, impressed on us: they were victims (...)* But in November 1995, during our first day of recollection, one among us asked: *'Isn't it our work to tackle the root causes of the situation? I have the impression we are firemen who come to verify the damage done after a pyromaniac has ignited a fire.'* Another burst out in the same vein: *'There is the danger of taking sides. Criticizing the refugees is not incompatible with being close to them. We must reflect with them about the reasons why they find themselves in exile today.'* Finally, a third added: *'We are not called to solve problems. We have no truth to bring. The truth comes where there is love.'*

*The dialogue between us had started. It did not stop until the team was dispersed at the same time as the camps were, in October 1996. I dare say our words took on a different shade compared to those exchanged by specialists on the geopolitics of the Great Lakes, simply because they were spoken with both feet firmly rooted in the hard reality of the refugee camps. A meeting in Kigali in February 1996 with JRS teams working in Rwanda and Burundi, and above all, the fact of being confronted with Rwanda's suffering in the wounds left by genocide and war – numerous orphans, the dumbness of survivors, fear of the future – allowed us to look at the camps with some hindsight and to acquire a more complete picture of the 'Rwandan crisis'.*



In this reflection on our experience, I used the Ignatian expression application of the senses, a method of prayer which invites us to mobilise all our being and especially our senses (SpEx 121-125). *For, what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savouring them interiorly*, wrote Ignatius (SpEx 2). Could this be paraphrased by affirming that what gives strength and savour to our advocacy in favour of refugees is the reality that it is not based on ideas and knowledge from books, but rather on direct experience? Doesn't the pedagogy of the Spiritual Exercises consist in making us enter into the history of salvation through contemplation of biblical texts *as if I were there* (SpEx 114)? Similarly, is it not fitting that we should enter into the history of the refugees through our concrete and sensitive presence, so as to get to know and make their cause known? This is why all JRS members, including those who devote themselves principally to analytical and lobbying work, should have the opportunity to concretely share in one way or another the refugees' journey. Providing this opportunity is a priority JRS takes very much to heart.

## *Conversion*

Ignatius of Loyola's spirituality is anything but a spirituality of the *just* in the pharisaic sense of the word. It is rather an open-eyed spirituality, open to the reality of evil and of sin, to those of the world, as well as to ours, mine. Didn't Ignatius charge the retreatant to *weigh* his own sins, in all their crudeness, during the first week of the Spiritual Exercises? For him, following Christ is grounded in a process of permanent conversion, in an attitude of liberating acknowledgement: acknowledgement of our sin, acknowledgement of God's work of reconciliation in us and in the world.

Serving refugees for several months or years, most of the time one is aware of a world marked by evil and darkness. *Accompanying refugees is a thrilling experience, but it is also highly demanding*, I wrote about our time in the highly complex world of Rwandan refugee camps. *One very quickly loses the illusion of being able to respond adequately to this or that situation, or to find the ideal solution to the most*

*urgent problems. When seen from the outside, humanitarian work shines brightly, when done seriously and with conviction, it becomes hard to bear.*

The plight of refugees is the result of sin: war, blind violence, hate, exclusion, an unlimited desire for power and riches, exploitation, misery ... Throwing ourselves into the world of refugees, we are often brutally exposed to our own limitations, our selfishness, our incoherence, and our need for recognition. Acknowledging our role in the 'sin of the world' brings us closer to the refugees, not so that we may wallow in sadness or pity, but on the contrary, that we may experience with them the sorrow they live.

*I was confronted, like never before, with hatred on a grand scale, the extreme suffering of so many people without exception, wrote Agathe Durand, a member of JRS in Bukavu. How is one to respond? There was nothing to be said. It was an experience of total alienation. I cried out for justice, peace, humanity and I saw nothing except a faint glimmer of them, and only for an instant. The impression of kenosis, a time of conversion which passed through points of reference like the certainty of God's presence, team solidarity, more frequent contact with the Word of life, the Scriptures, the Eucharist. Extreme situations such as the bombardments taught me to distance myself from fear, to dare to open my eyes, to challenge my 'good' intentions, my cowardice and my errors. On the most sombre evenings, prayer allowed me to accept that I had not been able to do more that day, and to start again the next day.*

Such attitude of conversion, experienced when accompanying refugees in the field, is even more indicated when we have to advocate their cause. Being sensitive and 'alert' to the presence of sin in the world, and especially to our responsibility for this sin, prevents us from advocating the refugees' cause as if we were preaching, or on a crusade. We will find the appropriate tone as we speak out from our own weakness, and perhaps our doubts; in any case, out of a humble awareness of the complexity of the questions we are tackling. In this sense, the spirituality in which we are invited to participate is one for the road: calling us to commitment but also never ceasing to call us into question and to put us on the move. Is this not a grace, enabling us as it does to share the plight of refugees, men and women?

## *“Being put together”*

If, for Ignatius, life in the Spirit is rooted in a heart-to-heart encounter with the Lord, it must develop through the experience of a community of heart and action. During his life, the community dimension grew in importance: companions joined him and they felt the grace of having been *put together* by the Lord to form a *Body for the Spirit*, the Society of Jesus.

*Full human liberation, for the poor and us all, lies in the development of communities of solidarity at the grass roots and nongovernmental as well as the political level* (CG 34, d.3, no.10). Advocating the cause of refugees is working towards communion, that is, against all forms of division and exclusion of which they are victims. The mission specific to JRS is fed by the dynamics of communion. Advocating the cause of refugees is a shared mission. We live this experience on a daily basis: one bears witness to what the refugees live through direct presence, another gathers and structures the information; and still others bring it to the attention of lawmakers, officials, the appropriate ministers, and to public opinion.

JRS, both as a whole but also within each team, is a community of life animated by the same service and mission. The community serves as a reference point in that it is a natural space for us to discern with God’s gaze upon us and in the light of all the analytical tools at our disposal, seeking the Spirit’s call in each particular situation. *Discernment is a key element of Ignatian spirituality and thus of our methodology*, writes Mark Raper (EC, 90). And since the mission is shared, discernment is also community-based.

The profound value of such shared discernment is revealed when the time comes for us to make the voice of refugees heard. A demanding procedure if ever there was one: listening to refugees, listening to each other, being enriched by different viewpoints, illuminating all these aspects through the Word of God, making them the subject of our personal and communal prayer, to finally search together for the right stand... All this calls for a great deal of respect, patience and time, given all the diverse cultural backgrounds from which we come.

But it is worthwhile. The experience of thematic work groups within the JRS shows us the fruits of our labour: the awareness in each one of us of being sustained and enlightened in his/her own mission and of participating in a common project, as well as the reinforcement and refinement of our claims.

Advocating the cause of refugees, it is important to encourage people to work together. It is in the refugees' best interest that their cause be defended by a harmony of voices, and not by a cacophony of discordant noises. The attention paid to team-work has always, from the beginning, been a characteristic of the JRS way of proceeding. *JRS is ready to collaborate with all persons, communities and organisations which similarly seek the immediate and long-term good of refugees*, declared members of JRS who came from different continents to meet in Kigali in 1995 (EC, 73). In recent years, JRS has strongly invested in building close bonds with other NGOs in international campaigns to bring about an end to situations of injustice and violence which affect refugees: antipersonnel landmines, child soldiers, detention of foreigners.

### *Looking to Jesus (Heb 12:2)*

In the small chapel of La Storta, not far from Rome, Ignatius of Loyola had a powerful experience where the Father *placed him with his Son* to serve. The person of Jesus Christ is central to Ignatian spirituality. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius never ceases to invite us to ask for the grace *to imitate Christ our Lord better and to be more like him* (SpEx 167). Contemplation of the life of Jesus has no goal other than fixing our eyes on him, allowing him to touch us so that through his Spirit we will discover how to follow him here and now. In what way is Jesus, the Christ, a model for those whose task is to advocate the cause of refugees?

Confident in his solidarity with all those who were marginalised from society, Jesus denounced all mechanisms and structures of exclusion, especially those supported by religious arguments. For example, he challenged the oppressively rigid application of the law of the Sabbath (Mk 3:1-6; Lk 14:1-6). Through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-30), he condemned as sin not only sepa-

ration between God and human beings but also whatever prevents the Kingdom of God from becoming a reality for the poor. All the same, Jesus never sought to create this Kingdom by power or force. He was *meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29) and never resorted to violence.

Through his actions and words, Jesus was a *witness to the truth* (cf. Jn 18:37), he unveiled what was hidden: the true face of God and his project of love. He was condemned to death by both religious and political powers because of what he dared to affirm. The cross itself is a denunciation of evil, and a revelation of the truth. It is an eminently public event: the crucified Jesus is exposed for all to see. Through this he is recognised as *just* (cf. Lk 23:47). Are not his words of love and forgiveness on the cross (Lk 23:34-43) the clearest revelation of the collapse of the reality of sin?

So, throughout his life, Jesus of Nazareth assumed the figure of the *go'el*, defined in the Old Testament as the *next of kin*, defender of the rights of the poor, of those who have lost everything. A figure in whom the people of God recognised their Lord: *Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise* (Ps 119,154).

Referring to the mission to advocate the cause of refugees in poverty, it is good to underline two traits of those who follow Jesus, to which Ignatius returns consistently: *poverty with Christ poor rather than wealth and contempt with Christ laden with it, rather than honours* (SpEx 167).

In the same way as the first Jesuit companions heeded the call to *preach in poverty*, we, as JRS members, are called to advocate in poverty the cause of the refugees. Our words will be all the more credible when backed first of all by our own personal poverty. What does this poverty consist of? Nothing more than has been mentioned above: our concrete solidarity in the field with refugees coupled with humility and fuelled by the hardships and complexity of the struggles we carry. An attitude which is inspired by the figure of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples: an attitude of humble service.

It is also an attitude of trust, of surrendering all our efforts to God, for these struggles are often discouraging. We are called to give without

counting, without being primarily concerned about the outcome. *Gratuitousness is an atmosphere in which the entire quest for effectiveness is bathed* (G. Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Wells*, London, 1984, p. 109). At the end of my stay in the camps in Bukavu, I came to the conclusion that *we who accompany displaced people, often in situations of great distress and in a climate of high volatility, are 'condemned' to live out this spirituality of the insignificant, of ineffectiveness, of failure, of patience. This patience belongs to God Himself. He could have communicated himself to us at once in an extraordinary manner. But no! He 'took his time': 30 years in Nazareth, the life of a man which ended like that of an evil doer. Unbelievable...*

Experience has also taught us that advocating the cause of refugees often takes place 'under the standard of the Cross'. Expressing solidarity with a group of vulnerable people whose rights are being scorned renders one vulnerable. Defending the rights of victims of injustice is to expose oneself to taunts, calumny, and injustice. Siding with the humiliated sometimes leads to being humiliated. We do not usually look for such consequences of our commitment with and for the refugees; rather, we would flee them because they leave a bitter taste. Yet when the time comes, a look at the Humiliated one on the Cross may bring peace, even though the bitterness is still there.

Finally, following Jesus does not only mean looking at him, but also looking at the world through his eyes. When we advocate the cause of refugees and when we are engaged in a struggle for justice, there is a great danger of becoming blinded by the goal – at the risk of justifying any means – or by the will to impose one's own right, at the risk of crushing the adversary.

The gaze of Jesus helps us to avoid these stumbling blocks. Jesus can certainly cast glares of anger at his adversaries (Mk 3:5) or have hard words to say about them (Mt 23:13ff). But he remains always animated by a passion for human beings. He attacks oppressive systems without targeting the men who run them. On the contrary, his denunciation of oppressive structures aims to liberate victims as well as perpetrators: isn't this the reason for his visit to Zaccheus (Lk 19:1-10)? The magnificent gospel of the adulterous woman is another perfect illustration. To defend this woman – to advocate her cause –



Jesus has but two weapons: humility – he *bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground* – and referring each to his conscience: *Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:6-7).

## *Hope*

Jesus looked at the world around him with tenderness and love. He knew how to discern the signs of the Kingdom – faith, love, generosity – in what seemed to be banal and even truly despised (Lk 7:9.44-46; 21:1-4). Out of this wonder sprang the little jewels which are the parables of the Kingdom. I personally experienced happiness in the meeting of these pages in the Gospel with the reality of our work in refugee camps. I would like to share an illustration with you here:

*The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened* (Mt 13:33).

*Yeast... surely nothing very special. Before it rises, there is certainly nothing in the dough to stimulate the appetite; what strikes you first is the inhumanity in the camps and the prevalent rancour, on the verge of igniting a new inferno of violence. But inside, something rises...*

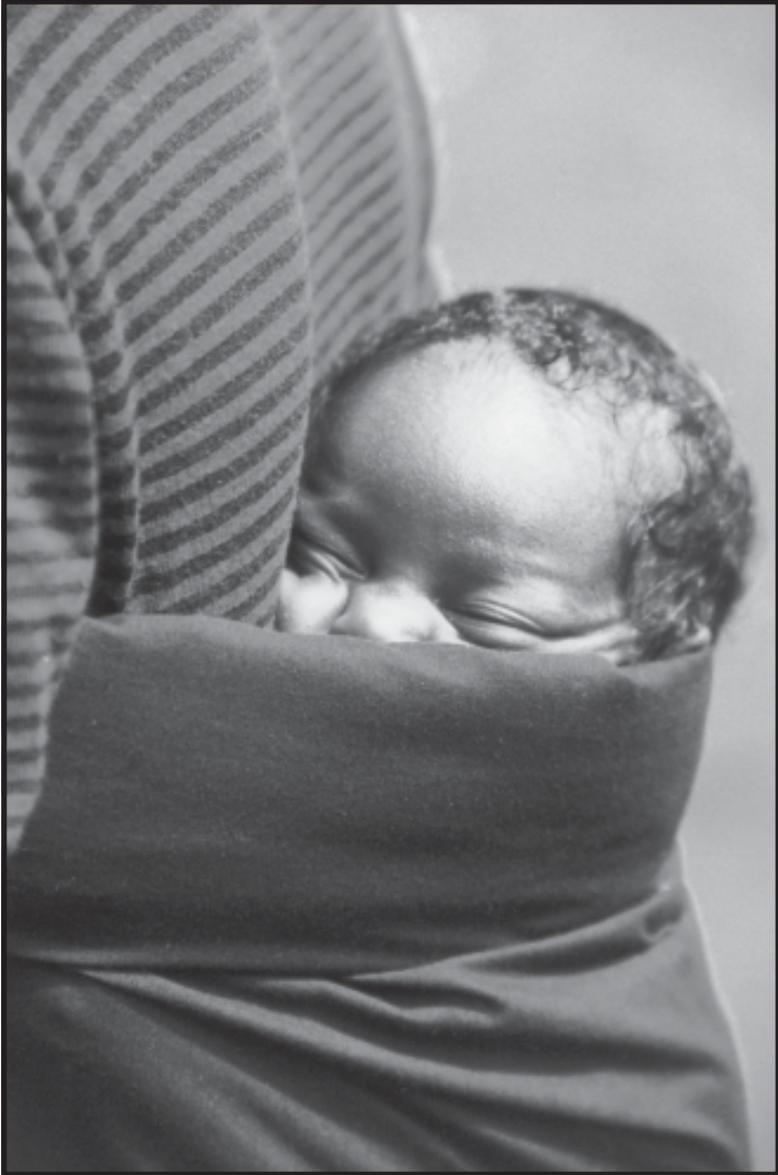
*A perceptive look, as if with a microscope, allows one to see 'daily miracles'. The 'child soldiers' in Karambo camp who catch a few little fish to offer them to a companion tied down in bed with malaria. Or the two young girls in Kigali, responsible for their little brothers, who come to each other's aid as neighbours beyond ethnic differences. Or the Congolese family which is not afraid to welcome refugees chased by the military. This is next to nothing. One would say this doesn't change the geopolitics of violence in the region. Yes, it's true! Yet these are signs that clear our view.*

*So through their dignity, refugees have unknowingly offered me a glimpse of the Kingdom. I remember writing, after my first weeks in the camps, how surprised I was to meet not human rags, but upright men and women. Schools were already at work well before we arrived and projects were not lacking. Our mission? It was first and foremost a look, that of hope: to recognise the seeds of the Kingdom. And then to feed them so the yeast would not suffocate and the dough would rise.*

In view of the difficulties, delays, disillusion, doubts and even setbacks that accompany those who are involved in defending the rights of refugees, this look of hope, even if unclear is vital. Without it, we would falter. Let's be honest. As Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote wisely, *hope is in no sense an evasion of concrete history; on the contrary, it leads to a redoubling of effort in the struggle against what brings unjust death.* (Gutiérrez, 118). When others tend to become discouraged in the face of the hazards of history, hope in a God who liberates and in his Kingdom in which all people can find their place, invites us to patiently reinitiate our efforts, and to offer a word of encouragement to our colleagues.

Advocating the cause of refugees is not a one-day job. Sometimes our contribution seems to accomplish nothing. Yet every step counts, however small it may be. Hope is also an invitation to have trust in the invisible, as this other parable expresses so well: *The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.* (Mk 4:26-29)

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JRS Belgium



John Kleiderer/JRS

## Chapter 5

# **STRONG ENOUGH OR WEAK ENOUGH?**

**Spirituality matters**

## STRONG ENOUGH OR WEAK ENOUGH?

*Who better to share their experiences of people on the move and spirituality than the Jesuits who have led JRS at one time or another? This chapter draws on writings and reflections of all four past and present International Directors – Michael Campbell-Johnston, Dieter Scholz, Mark Raper and Lluís Magriñà – to give an insight into the fruit of “25 years of learning with refugees”.*

Ignatius Loyola failed with at least two sets of companions, in Barcelona, Alcalá and Paris, before he settled on the small group who with him founded the Jesuits. His experience with his first followers was sobering. They were strong on enthusiasm, and made the right spiritual noises; but they fell away when Ignatius was arraigned by the Inquisition, imprisoned, and humiliated. While Ignatius could see this experience as donning the livery of Christ, the young men who admired him were dismayed, and felt something had gone wrong. So, Ignatius knew more was needed when companions wanted to follow him. When Peter Faber, Francis Xavier and others gathered round Ignatius in Paris, he held them off from any commitment until he had put them through the Spiritual Exercises, especially the meditation on Two Standards. They needed to taste the failure and hopelessness of the suffering Jesus, and maintain their faith and hope through it.

The same spiritual commitment was needed for the first Jesuit Refugee Service. During the harsh winter of 1538, the early Jesuits went out begging for the displaced who had poured into Rome from the surrounding countryside in search of food, medicine and shelter. The companions gave up the house in which they lived to take in the displaced. They spent the day begging for food, which they carried in bags on their shoulders, and at night they cared for the old and sick, cooking food for them and washing the invalids. Similarly, when he launched JRS in 1980, Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe urged his companions to do *more* than we were doing then, not just quantitatively but in the sense of the Ignatian *magis* by being with and sharing the lives of the radically poor of our time, the refugees.

JRS took shape rapidly and grew with a minimum of red tape. Twenty-five years later is a good time to reflect on that experience in the same mood as Ignatius in Paris: what *more* do we need? The reflection leads us, as it led Ignatius, to think about spirituality. Indeed, what distinguishes JRS from other organisations committed to working with refugees is a particular vision, intimately linked to the personal experience of Ignatius.

Without this vision, the work of JRS may well decline into a routine which barely differs from political administration. People will volunteer for it who want to belong to a well-run organisation with admirable aims. Some of them may have failed in other work and seek refuge in JRS. All of them find with time that the service of refugees can test, and sometimes break, their spirit: something more is needed beyond well-organized efficiency. The spirituality that animates JRS is, therefore, as practical and vital an issue as choosing the right sort of fuel to power a rocket. In Jesuit parlance, JRS needs to define its own way of proceeding.

From the time of Pedro Arrupe on, it is clear that for many, both Jesuits and others, JRS has offered a vocation which draws the best out of them and sharpens their spiritual outlook. The first International Director of JRS, Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ, asked to choose a scriptural text which might serve as a motto for a JRS vocation, suggested: *There is more happiness in giving than in receiving* (Acts 20:35). That, he said, was the early experience of us all. How do we move towards this happiness?

## **It starts in encounters**

Spirituality does not come from books or sermons. It comes from encounters. Jesus met people and told them stories. Michael remembers some such meetings. *The first encounter, initially on a weekly basis, was with Fr Arrupe himself who showed an enormous interest in this new apostolate and wanted to be informed about it in detail. Other early encounters were with Eritrean refugees in Rome for whom we eventually set up the Centro Astalli. The Mother General of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart left her General Chapter on its first day to come to the Curia and offer eight*



*places in her Generalate for Eritreans sleeping out rough and, every time I met her, she thanked us again for the great blessing we had given her and her Congregation. Whenever one went away, she immediately phoned up for a replacement. These encounters taught me that direct contact with the poor is essential and changes us.*

Mark Raper SJ remembers how he was changed through meetings. *Some encounters give you a shock. You have to stop and look again. The world appears different. You see through the eyes of another. It is a fresh view, it gives joy, and it makes new sense. I met a woman whose husband was taken by the war, whose oldest son was also caught and killed, who would still cook food for her neighbours, whatever they had done and who went on dreaming of a world without war. Time and again I have met young men and women teachers, who travelled months on foot with their people through the dense African scrub or Asian jungle, yet as soon as they reached a safe place, they constructed a shelter as a school and gathered children together to learn, and to inspire them with plans and hopes for their future. I met a woman whose neighbour was dying of cholera. She simply took the neighbour's child despite the risks to herself, and was nursing the child to life. I met a woman who forgave, face to face, and in front of many people, the man responsible for the death of her sister and two of her children. Later she found her husband who had fled by a different route, and they started their lives together again.*

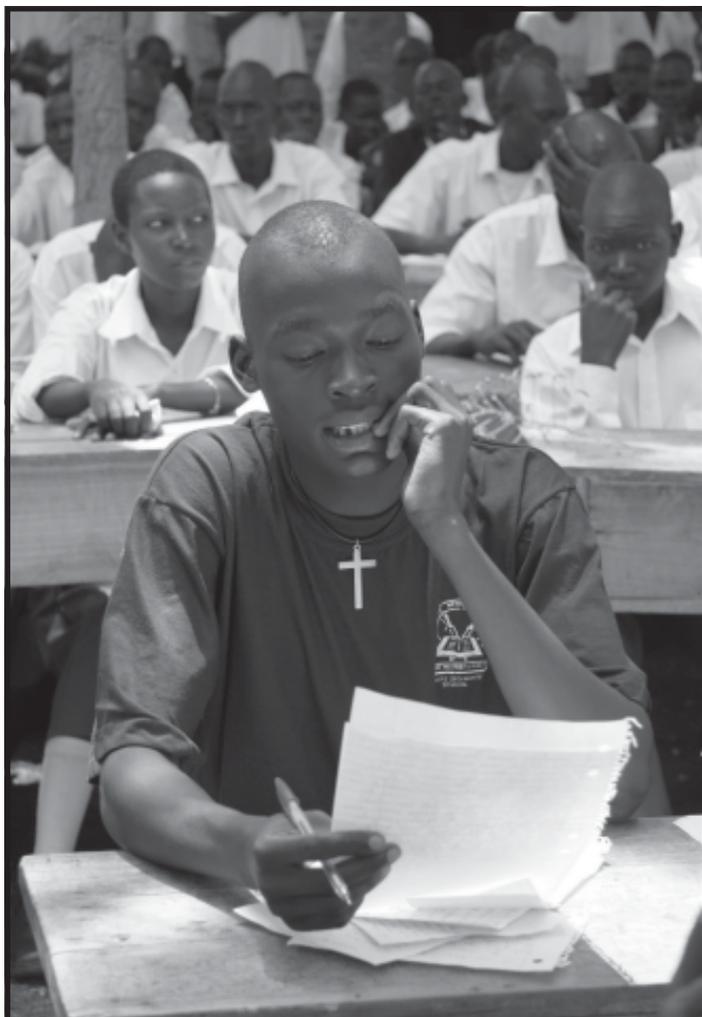
Lluís Magriñà SJ recalls an encounter during a visit to southern Sudan: *We found around 3,000 people, mainly women, children and elderly, who had arrived around two weeks before us. It was, they told us, the fourth time they had to move because the places where they lived had been bombed. My thoughts on seeing all these people who were – some of them – almost starving, was that they were sheep without a shepherd. They talked about their difficult situation, saying they had had no food for two weeks, that they were sick and needed medication. They wanted to start school (actually they had already started; there was a blackboard under a tree). They wanted to show us much how they value education.*

*It was not easy to say something in such a situation. I told them that we would try to answer their needs as soon as possible. But for me, it was important that we keep the problem of war in Sudan in the attention of the international community. We should strive for peace as soon as possible.*

*When I finished talking, one old man said something to the project director. I saw from his eyes he was saying something important, so I asked what it was. He had said: "Your words are sweeter than the food we do not have." This man understood: if they had peace, they would have food, medicine, and education, they could cultivate the earth and manage their own lives. This encounter taught me about the importance of peace.*

From encounters like these, a spirituality has taken shape. It grows from solidarity with and accompaniment of those we serve, it is rooted in similar experiences found in the Bible, and is animated by a deep personal love of Jesus.

Don Doll SJ/JRS



## Solidarity and accompaniment: strength and weakness

JRS spirituality is marked by solidarity with those we serve. In JRS, solidarity with refugees often translates into advocacy, defending the rights of refugees, or even protecting them from the cruelty and exploitation of camp commanders, soldiers and policemen, as happens all over the world, on the Thai-Cambodian border, in Hong Kong, in Indonesia, in Africa's Great Lakes region. This way of showing solidarity can sometimes be life-saving for refugees, and JRS often has the right people and resources to do it, and do it well. Most of us feel almost instinctively inclined to do so: to protest, to stand up, to challenge, to defy and to confront in situations where we witness evil men and evil actions. We want to act.

JRS early on discovered that such *activism* was shattered by powerlessness. Dieter Scholz SJ recalls that when people asked JRS workers what distinguished them from other similar groups, they answered: *Our goal is to be **with** refugees rather than do things **for** them.* *With* and *for* are the operative words here. They took on a new meaning for Dieter after five years at Mary Mount Mission, a big rural parish with some 40 outstations and two camps with Mozambican refugees. He heard how their villages were burnt and their crops destroyed, how boys aged between 12 and 15 were forced to slaughter one or both of their parents in front of the assembled village community. He was stunned by the number of refugees who suffered from mental and emotional stress as a result of what they had been through, yet he felt powerless to help. Against that background, the words *being with refugees* took on not just a more concrete meaning, but something altogether new. They meant something that Dieter had not realised or understood before.

In those days, when people applied to work with JRS, they would receive a six-page questionnaire asking for detailed, even personal information, for example whether the applicant had ever suffered from a mental disorder, instability, psychological stress, alcoholism or other problems. When one former Superior General of a large religious congregation was honest enough to admit that several years

earlier she had received counselling for depression, this was noted in red ink as a negative point in her evaluation. *Today, says Dieter, I feel stupid and ashamed about this.* Perhaps the earlier reaction could be understood because a number of Jesuit Provincials did have the habit of sending JRS their problem cases, men they could not cope with or place anywhere in their provinces, or men who were on their way out of religious life and who they sent to a refugee camp for a final test of their vocation.

So, while presenting itself as an organisation that wanted to be *with* refugees rather than do things *for* them, in fact, when recruiting workers, JRS looked for persons *strong* enough, and eager, to do things *for* refugees. It often turned down applicants who would have been well suited to do what we said JRS was all about, because they admitted to being *weak* enough just to want to *be with refugees*, to walk with them on the road to wherever they were going. In other words, we applied standards of measuring people by their brains, their capacity for leadership, their ability to teach or to run other programmes for refugees, or to deal with funding partners, to write reports, to compile financial accounts, to be practical with their hands, and so on. We preferred candidates who seemed to be prayerful, socially adept, intellectually perceptive, possessing interior integrity, sound common sense and habits of hard work. We assumed these qualities would make a finer refugee worker.

Indeed in many cases they did. But often they did not. The question nobody asked – but which we would probe carefully today – is whether candidates are *weak enough* to be able to be with refugees. Are they deficient enough so that they cannot ward off significant suffering from their lives, so that they must live with a certain amount of failure, so that they may fleetingly understand what it is like to be a refugee? Is there any history of confusion, of self-doubt, of interior anguish? Have they had to deal with fear, to come to terms with frustrations, deflated expectations and humiliation? These are critical questions we should ask of anyone offering to serve in a difficult, perhaps dangerous refugee situation today.



## A taste of Scripture

JRS directors have suggested some biblical texts that can act as key references for JRS, and nourish our meditations. Among them are the following:

- *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1).* This is the kind of call we have to be ready for, open to go wherever there is need, and to continue to trust in God even when everything seems hopeless. We need this perspective especially in situations of great despair.

- Moses as a refugee in his little papyrus basket and Noah fleeing the floods in the ark (Ex 2:3-5; Gen 6:14) are people whose stories recall flight, escape, and the saving power of the Almighty. The story of the *habiru*, the wanderers who became the Hebrew people, is at heart a story of refugees. Moses led his people out of exile as we read in the book of Exodus. They fled slavery in Egypt, where they had been denied the freedom to bear children, to rest and to worship. The Israelites needed repeated reminders that they were originally refugees. The great Leviticus 19 command tells what love and faithfulness is: *When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.* (Lev 19:33-34).

- *By the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept.* Psalm 137 is truly evocative of refugee experience.

- *Yet I am among you as one who serves* (Luke 22:27): this passage illustrates the way in which the choices and decisions of JRS are primarily guided by the needs of refugees, and not by considerations internal to the organisation. It also defines the character of JRS work, based on its presence among refugees, and only then moving to service and to advocacy on their behalf, all of which remain rooted in accompaniment. The text captures something of the attentiveness to which we are drawn by our service of refugees.

## The weakness of Jesus

The main biblical resource is, of course, the life of Jesus. To savour what it means to accompany the weak and to feel our deficiencies as part of our vocation in JRS, Dieter draws on the Letter to the Hebrews: *Because Jesus himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested... for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin... He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness* (Heb 2:18; 4:15; 5:2).

What does weakness mean here? As Michael J. Buckley SJ explains in a profound reflection, *Because Beset with Weakness*, it is not the experience of sin, but almost its opposite. Weakness is the experience of a peculiar liability to suffering, a profound sense of inability both to do and to protect: an inability, even after a great effort, to perform as we should want, to achieve what we had determined, to succeed with the completeness that we might have hoped. It is this openness to suffering which results in an inability to secure our own future, to protect ourselves from any adversity, to live with easy clarity and assurance, or to ward off shame, pain, or even interior anguish.

There is a classic comparison between Christ and Socrates, that most noble of Greek philosophers. When Socrates was condemned by his fellow Athenians for his questioning, which they said was corrupting youth, he went to his death with calmness and poise. He accepted the judgment of the court, discoursed on the alternatives suggested by death and on the dialectical indications of immortality, found no cause for fear, drank the hemlock, and died.

John Kleiderer/JRS



Jesus was different, almost hysterical with terror and fear, *with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death*, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it (Heb 5:7). He looked repeatedly to his friends for comfort, and prayed for an escape from death; and he found neither. Finally he won control over himself and moved into his death in silence and lonely isolation, gripped by the terrible interior suffering of the absence of God.

Was it just that Jesus and Socrates died different deaths, the one so much more terrible than the other? Perhaps, but this explanation would be superficial. The deeper reason is that Jesus was a more profoundly weak man than Socrates, more liable to physical pain and weariness, more sensitive to human rejection and contempt, more affected by love and hatred. Socrates never wept over Athens. Socrates never expressed sorrow and pain over the betrayal of friends. He was self-possessed, never over-extended, convinced that the just man could never suffer genuine hurt. For this reason Socrates – one of the greatest and most heroic men who ever existed, and a shining example of what humanity can achieve in the individual – was a philosopher. For the same reason Jesus of Nazareth was a man in solidarity with the poor: ambiguous, suffering, mysterious, and redeeming.

Weakness links us profoundly with God, because it provides a privileged arena in which his grace can be seen, in which his sustaining presence can reveal itself, in which even his power can become manifest. This is why weakness stands as almost the opposite of sin. Weakness is a chosen context for the epiphany of the Lord, it is the night in which he appears – not always felt as assurance, but rather as a power to move on faithfully, even when we do not feel the strength, even when fidelity means simply putting one foot in front of the other.

The experience of weakness deepens both our sensitivity to human need and our experience of prayer. There is an important consequence for all of us in JRS: we must support one another in weakness, forgiving one another our daily faults and carrying one another's burdens. It would be absurd to maintain weakness as essentially part of our JRS vocation and then to belittle those who are deficient, to resent those who are insensitive, unsophisticated or clumsy, to allow disagreements to become hostilities, or to continue battles and angers because of personal histories.

## Personal love of Jesus

The encounters shaping our vision and giving us energy are first of all also with Jesus. In Chapter 21 of his Gospel, John tells a story of such an encounter, revealing the deeper reality behind the events described. This may help us to better understand our encounters in JRS. The story of John 21 can be seen as a powerful image of the apostolic efforts of the first generation of Christians, and therefore a link between Jesus and his disciples, between the risen Lord and the early Christian community, and also between Jesus and ourselves.

The text is unique in the New Testament in that it makes Peter's profession of his deep personal love for Jesus the condition for being given responsibility and leadership. Secondly, Jesus makes Peter profess his love for him by reminding him of his earlier betrayal, perhaps in order to purify Peter's love from its pride, conceit and vanity. Jesus wants nothing less than a wholly committed, transparent and unselfish Peter who does not trust in his own strength and power but who is aware of his recent betrayal and failure, and therefore trusts only in the risen Lord: *Simon, son of John, do you love me, do you love me more than these?*

Nowhere else in the New Testament is a person asked so directly and insistently whether he/she loves Jesus. Not even John, the disciple Jesus loved, is ever confronted with having to answer that question. This personal love is so central it is worth exploring its dimensions: how it relates to betrayal, to responsibility for others, and to the quality of our service to refugees.

The original Greek text of John 21 uses two words for love, *agape* and *philia*. Jesus asks Peter twice whether he loves him, using *agape*, meaning a love of sacrifice and generosity, as in I Corinthians 13. Twice, Peter answers using *philia*, which occurs rarely in the New Testament and means a deep personal relationship such as the love between two friends, or between a young man and a young woman. We could read *agape* as divine love and *philia* as deep and sincere human love. When Jesus asks Peter for the third time whether he loves him, he uses Peter's word for love.

Twice Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him the way God loves us. Twice Peter – now chaste and modest in his choice of words after being reminded of his betrayal – replies that he loves Jesus the way he loves his best friend. The third time Jesus asks whether Peter truly loves him the way he loves his closest friend, and Peter replies: Yes, I do love you as I love my closest friend. Jesus meets Peter where he is now. He will help his love to grow, to become deep and strong enough to die for him. Now, Peter’s love is that of a friend. At the moment of his death, Peter will love Jesus as Jesus loves him.

At this moment of truth, Jesus reminds Peter of his darkest hour, by asking him three times, and by meeting him and the other disciples round the charcoal fire on the beach. The charcoal fire is mentioned only twice in the New Testament: first when Peter betrays Jesus, and secondly here, when Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him. It highlights the close link between deep personal love for Jesus and betrayal or sin. It shows how weak people love and grow in their love. We know we are sinners, yet called to be companions of Jesus.

We are sinners not just in general, but precisely in our service of refugees. Lluís acknowledges that there have been times when we have seen refugees simply as numbers, often overwhelming numbers, rather than as people; times when we have been unable to listen to their needs. We have lost time and allowed suffering by delays in responding to challenges and requests for help. Michael asks forgiveness because, at the founding of JRS, *our own Curia never opened its doors to take in Eritrean refugees*. We must face our corporate as well as our individual sin.



## Love and excellence in our mission

In John 21, Jesus not only asks Peter three times whether he loves him, but also whether he loves him *more* than the other disciples do. And here lies the source of Peter's leadership and mission. Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him, then tells him to go and lead, to go and make important decisions. Jesus tells him, and us, that at the heart of our exercise of leadership there must be love, not power. That too is a distinctive feature of serving refugees in JRS.

The question points to the dynamics of the Ignatian *magis*: the Lord calls us to excellence in his service. We need to be professionals. We can only share what we have. If we have nothing, we cannot share anything. So we need sound pedagogy and good methodology. We increasingly feel we need to improve our skills to be able to give better training and skills to refugees. But we are called to do more than improve our professionalism: in the Spiritual Exercises (SpEx 104) we find: *I ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord who has become human for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely.* To be a member of JRS is to serve refugees for no other reason but our deep personal love for Jesus, which makes us recognise his face in the face of every refugee and enter into a close friendship with the refugees. We are called to both increase our professionalism and deepen our intimacy with God. Here lies the foundation of our accompaniment.

The Chiang Mai statement of 1985 stresses the role of accompaniment: *While always ready to help refugees in their material and spiritual wants, and also in designing projects leading to a fuller and more independent life, we try to place special emphasis on **being with** rather than **doing for**. We want our presence among refugees to be one of sharing with them, of accompaniment, of walking together along the same path. In so far as possible, we want to feel what they have felt, suffer as they have, share the same hopes and aspirations, see the world through their eyes. We ourselves would like to become one with the refugees and displaced people so that, all together, we can begin the search for a new life.*

A bond and even community is created between refugees and members of JRS. Mutuality lies at its heart. Nothing inspires a taste for accompaniment better than the experience of being accompanied;

nothing helps listening more than being listened to. The shared life of JRS emphasises and embodies occasions for accompanying and listening to other members, particularly new members.

Where accompaniment is at the heart of our way of proceeding, we shall inevitably be led to the refugees' deepest concerns. They will normally include the injustice they have suffered, the nourishment of their faith and hope, their cultural wounds, and the differences between their way of expressing faith and ours. Through accompaniment, JRS workers encourage refugees to hope that they and their society have a future. The refugees who have lost everything communicate their paradoxical freedom in loss.

## **Ignatian discernment**

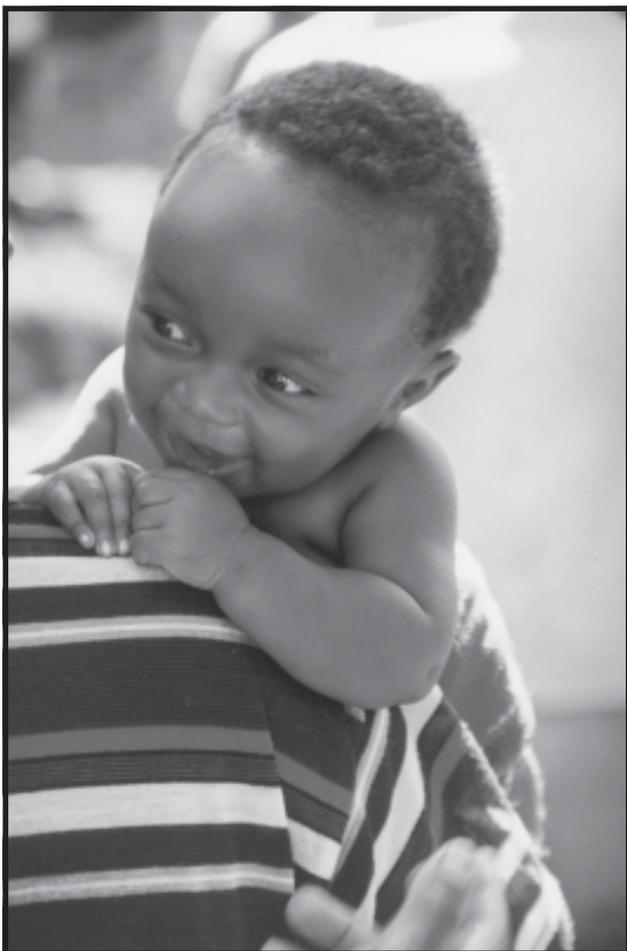
In operations as flexible and fast moving as JRS, there is a constant demand for decisions to be made. How do we as a team take the important decisions which affect our lives, our work and the lives of the people for whose sake we are here? Imagine the sort of awkward contingencies which are bound to arise: members leaving the team; JRS personnel expelled from a camp; a team member falling seriously ill; tensions in the team. Where the debate both among JRS workers and refugees and between the workers themselves comes out of accompaniment, the conditions and criteria for communal discernment are present. The mutual accompaniment will suggest ways to make decisions. Our responses to challenges should emerge from a well-rehearsed habit of communal discernment, which has its roots in Ignatian spirituality.

Elements of communal discernment, as an essential part of Ignatian spirituality, should be familiar to lay people and other religious who collaborate with JRS. It would help them, together with refugees, to take decisions about a range of situations arising in camps and elsewhere.

The first thing Ignatius would say about our decision-making is that we have to learn from experience, so as not to commit the same errors over again. The second thing is that we should reflect on our experience, to try to analyse what happened, why something worked while another thing did not.

Discernment means keeping our feet on the ground in assessing what the real possibilities are, and ultimately looking for ways to make our work successful. We are in search of success, so we must be well prepared. This implies identifying all the elements in a given situation. Our decisions arise out of the reality around us; we discern for and with refugees, in a communal action which draws strength from the shared Eucharist. Our presence in the field gives strength and credibility to our decisions.

John Kleiderer/JRS



God's grace overcomes all evil, but it may require a special effort to discern the hand of God in the places and situations where we work. God's grace breaks through into our lives at surprising times and in surprising ways. Refugee crises erupt at inconvenient times. *On occasion, after strenuous efforts over years with some groups of refugees, says Mark Raper, we have gathered the JRS workers together for a sustained discernment that took weeks, searching by prayer, research and discussion, for the best way forward. Each time there were stunning results, with long-lasting consequences for our engagement in new strategies and projects and for planned withdrawal from others.*

## **A dream for the future**

The opportunity to accompany and serve refugees is a gift of God. The dramatic forced movement of peoples today is a *sign of the times*. By our presence among people on the move, our hearts and minds are cracked open and we can learn much about our world and its needs. Refugees inspire generosity. Unlikely allies join together as brothers and sisters precisely because they have a common bond through refugees.

Serving refugees also confronts us with failure. We need to discern with them our mission by committing ourselves as both professional and weak people following God's power and weakness in Jesus. Our dream is that one day we will be able to close the doors of JRS, because there will be no more refugees or internally displaced people in our world and we will be able to live as true brothers and sisters, loving one another. There will be peace and justice: in other words, the Kingdom of God will be a reality in this world. In the meantime we know we are weak and that we cannot walk alone. We ask for God's grace to continue this way of loving that is JRS, faithful to our brothers and sisters in need, in the spirit with which Fr Arrupe launched it:

*God of compassion, in your son you shared the life of all who are excluded. May we search for you in the places and among the people of your choice. May we follow the compassionate Jesus. May we walk with those driven from their own homes. Place our hands, our hearts, and our minds at their service. Lead us on your way together, until at last we all find our home in you. Amen.*

Appendix 1

## **IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**

Appendix 2

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY**

## IGNATIUS of LOYOLA (1491 - 1556)

The life of Ignatius is both unusual and attractive, as much because of the many dramatic external circumstances in which he lived, especially from the age of 26, as for the slow internal transformation that he gradually and irrevocably experienced.

Little is known about his infancy and early youth: he was born in 1491 in what was then called a "tower-house" (*casa-torre*), a fortified home in the Province of Guipúzcoa (Basque country) in the north of Spain.

Baptized with the name *Iñigo*, though in adult life he took over the name *Ignatius*, he was the thirteenth child born to María and Beltrán, a couple married in 1467. There were five sisters and eight brothers; several of the latter became soldiers although Pedro, who was only a little older than Iñigo became a priest. The first years of his life were spent in the Urola valley, where the climate was mild if rather damp, brought up in a well-to-do family and educated in courtly circles and surroundings. On the death of his parents, both of whom must have died before 1507, Iñigo, now aged 16, was already installed in the household of the Finance Minister of Charles V at his palace in Arévalo, in central Spain.

At the end of the summer of 1517 Iñigo set off on a new stage of his life (1517-May 1521), this time in the service of the Duke of Nájera, the Viceroy of Navarre, Don Pedro Manrique de Lara. This would complete his training as a knight, and culminate in a heroic, if rash, gesture of generosity to the King. Iñigo opens the account of his life (the so-called *Autobiography*) with a description of this event.

Iñigo had decided to defend the fortress of Pamplona against all odds, then under attack from a French army (May 1521), although all *saw clearly that they could not defend themselves* [Au 1]. During the assault *a shot hit him in one leg, completely shattering it*. And so began a new direction to Iñigo's life: the knightly courtier, who thus far had devoted himself to the superficiality of the *vanities of the world*, embarked on a descent into the abyss of his own internal world.

Once back in his birthplace, the surroundings of Loyola provided a peaceful setting where he could recover the use of his leg, and where questions about his past life, feelings about his present state, and fantasies about his future could emerge. Some books were to be the stimulus for a flowering of thoughts and feelings: a short collection of saints' lives and a life of Christ (the *Vita Christi* by Ludolf of Saxony, a 'bestseller' in the religious culture of the time) [Au 5]. Eight months passed, during which time Iñigo hardly moved out of his room and found himself caught up in intense psychological and spiritual activity. This period would gradually transform the whole world of his values and horizons. A new way of understanding life, as mirrored in the life of Jesus and the saints, started to exert its influence: new models were suggested to be imitated, surpassed, and followed. Iñigo began to see links between causes and consequences, between what came to him *from outside*, and what he produced within himself [SpEx 32]. Interpretation of these links constituted what was unique to his particular *religious experience*. While his leg was healing, Ignatius was gaining greater clarity about his new resolutions: he had reoriented his desires, and from now on the *will of God* as his final horizon would never leave him.

Towards the end of February 1522, straddling a mule [Au 13], Iñigo left home, his head full of extravagant and pious fantasies and his heart full of desires to *love and serve Jesus all the more*. To his great surprise he found himself transported from a world of political ambitions and of knightly ideals – all now dramatically frustrated by his serious war wound – into another world of the spirit, where Jesus Christ was the centre of his life. Still young and ingenuous, Ignatius had no idea yet of what following Jesus would mean.

His principal goal had become almost an obsession: he was to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem, imitating in every way the saints and Jesus himself. However, he first had to undertake a long interior journey. Ignatius had understood that in his desire to become like his new Lord, first of all he had to opt for poverty. This fundamental option quickly became reality with a change of clothes. He handed over his own clothes *to a poor man* [Au 18] and donned *sackcloth*. He wanted this change of outward attire to express the new attitude that was shaping his life. His friendship with poverty was

something he would guard faithfully all his life. It was poverty that moved Ignatius to desire *not to be recognized* [Au 18], to run away from honours, to prefer the porticos [Au 41] and covered colonnades of squares, or almshouses and hospitals, to lodging in palaces or in the houses of friends and relatives [Au 18, 19, 56, 74]. As his heart turned to poverty he sought surroundings that would be simple and poor, a setting where he could be more spontaneously and naturally himself. Without doubt Ignatius found himself living more at ease among the lowly and the humble than in the circles of power and influence that had shaped him up to then.

The desire for and inclination to poverty was to accompany Ignatius along all the routes he followed, but at the same time and perhaps more importantly, the love of poverty helped him draw the map of his *intentions, actions and operations* [SpEx 46]. It was in poverty that he chose to live in Manresa while taking the first steps on his spiritual journey [Au 23]; he had stopped there while en route to Barcelona, where he planned to take a ship for Jerusalem. In Manresa he took up a form of exaggerated austerity, for although he meant well he lacked any knowledge of *discernment* [Au 14]; perhaps he was more preoccupied with his *spiritual* self-image than with following the Lord. At one point, wishing to imitate a saint who *went without food for many days* [Au 24], he *persisted the whole week without putting a single thing into his mouth* [Au 25]. However it was while living in Manresa that Ignatius experienced one of the deepest and decisive events in his spiritual development: one evening, as he sat on the bank facing the little Cardoner River he had a sudden *intuition* of the ultimate harmony of all things. He contemplated and regarded the world *with an enlightenment so strong that all seemed new to him* [Au 30]; he realized, as never before, that all things, those already there, are much more than what we manage to see. To use his own word one could say that he saw everything as *creatures*, linked by an unbreakable bond to their Creator. In the final analysis, all *things* are holy and the world is the *place of God*... This experience would direct Ignatius once and for all towards a *spirituality that is for the world and in the world*. Eventually this experience found systematic expression as the culminating point of a path that runs through the *Spiritual Exercises: God dwells in creatures* [SpEx 235], *every gift descends from on high* [SpEx 237]. This is a charism that every Jesuit,

and everyone who would follow Jesus in the wake of Ignatius, inherits at least in part. Such a person cannot but be passionate for the world and its inhabitants, especially the least among them.

The period of almost 11 months spent by Ignatius in Manresa constituted for him not only a discovery of prayer and personal knowledge but also an initiation in his relationship to poverty; it was a *point of no return*. Much thought, discernment and prayer would still have to be devoted to the way in which poverty was to be understood, and how one was to be poor in the following of Christ [SpEx 167], but there could be no denial of its permanent role.

When Ignatius felt that his time in Manresa was complete *he left for Barcelona in order to board ship* [Au 35] for Venice, from where he could embark for Jerusalem. He wanted to travel in poverty, *not just alone, but without any provisions*, desiring to put all his confidence and hope *with regard to God alone* [Au 35]. Very early on Ignatius realized that to choose poverty meant to choose the providence of the Good God, who knows the needs of his children [Au 35]. This spiritual experience was one that would become elevated into one of his firmest convictions: *without money, yet Ignatius had a great conviction in his soul; he couldn't be doubtful; rather he was meant to find a way of getting to Jerusalem* [Au 40]. Poverty, dispossession, trust... faith.

It is poor and humble people who light up the first pilgrimages of Ignatius across Europe: he shares with them the first coins that he had for his passage to Jerusalem [Au 40]. In Venice he *slept in St Mark's square* [Au 42], choosing these surroundings as *he always refused to go to the house of the Imperial Ambassador* [Au 42].

His stay in Jerusalem was short, lasting a little more than one month (August – September, 1523). The great project that had sparked his enthusiasm from the early days of his conversion [Au 8, 12] was brusquely cut short at the command of the Franciscans of the Holy Land. Even if he insisted that *his firm intention was to remain in Jerusalem forever with the desire of helping souls* [Au 45], the decision of those responsible for the area was firm: pilgrims were not permitted to remain there.

So in February, 1524, Ignatius returned to Barcelona asking himself *what was to be done* [Au50]. Some things he could see clearly: in poverty, for Christ, on behalf of his neighbour, or as he expressed it, *to be able to help souls*. In order to be of more help, he began to study. He had arrived poor in Barcelona, and he wanted to remain in poverty while he studied Latin grammar, sharing a classroom desk with children. In the *Autobiography* he describes how *he began to make a hole in the soles of his shoes... so that when the cold of winter came he was then wearing nothing but the uppers* [Au 55]. As soon as Ignatius and his teacher felt that he had acquired enough Latin to begin further studies Ignatius set off for Alcalá, well known for its university. Once there, *he began to beg and to live on alms* until the man in charge of the almshouse offered him *a room and everything he needed* [Au 56].

Very soon his way of living and first pastoral activities started to attract people, and he began to give them the Spiritual Exercises as a way of initiating them along the path of friendship with God the Father. Moreover, in addition to these tasks, Ignatius took care of those most in need: he was able to collect funds *to relieve the poor* [Au 57]. But his way of life, especially all that concerned his spiritual practices and teaching, soon aroused suspicion among the ecclesiastical authorities, very sensitive to all that smacked in Spain of doubtful orthodoxy. Ignatius was twice called to be interrogated by the Inquisition in Alcalá; he emerged triumphant, but not without having had to spend *17 days in the prison* on one occasion [Au 61], and 42 days on the second [Au 62]. In neither trial were they able to find any error, but he was warned very seriously that he could not continue teaching Christian doctrine without having first studied theology. His many occupations and preoccupations prevented any serious study, so after a short stay in Salamanca, where once more he had problems with the Inquisition and was imprisoned [Au 67-70], Ignatius decided to migrate to another country, where he would be able to dedicate himself more fully to his studies.

*Alone and on foot* [Au 73] he left for Paris in early February, 1528. However, in the most exclusive university city of Europe it was hardly possible for such a pilgrim, rather small of stature, limping, poor, yet very alert, to pass unnoticed. For the sake of poverty he decided to lodge at the Parisian almshouse of St Jacques [Au 74]

and then proceed with his studies at the University of the Sorbonne. In Paris he took Christ as his guarantor as he established his contacts and friendships, and was able to verify the excellence of the method that he had tried on both himself and others ever since Manresa. The first to enter the *circle of Ignatius*, and through him come under the sway of Jesus, were on the one hand a timid priest from Savoy, Pierre Favre, and on the other an impetuous student from Navarre, Francis Xavier. Together they would transform their lives into a continuous search for the will of God.

In Paris, Ignatius set about integrating the practice of virtue with the study of texts. His style of living and his sensitivity spread among the *first companions*: each of them, once they had made the Spiritual Exercises, saw clearly a life-plan ahead on behalf of their fellow men, based on friendship with the poor and Jesus. The group gradually grew until, in 1535, when Ignatius had finished his studies, it consisted of 10: Ignatius himself, Xavier and Favre had been joined by Laínez, Salmerón, Bobadilla and Simon, with the addition, almost at the end of his study course, of Jean Codure, Paschase Broët and Claude Jay. They were all linked as a group by their friendship with Ignatius and by their common experience of the Exercises. They came from different parts of Europe (Spain, France and Portugal), and the first seven had set a seal on their shared project in a little chapel on the outskirts of Paris on 15 August 1534: they would make a pilgrimage together to Jerusalem and stay there if at all possible, but otherwise they would go to Rome and place themselves at the disposal of the Pope. Such were the *vows of Montmartre*, and one year later the three new companions made a similar commitment.

Passing through his native land (Loyola – Azpeitia) in 1535, where he had gone to profit from *the native air* as a remedy for his illness [Au 85], Ignatius lodged at the almshouse of the Magdalena, and *for the poor, he had arrangements set up for public provision, and regularly* [Au 89]. He went on, *without money* [Au 89], from Azpeitia, and continued on his journey through Spain, *without taking anything* [Au 90]. Meanwhile Ignatius grew in close affection for the sick [Au 79, 83, 95], along with the poor, and this was to be a part of himself that he would never let go.

Once the companions finished their studies in Paris they met up again in Venice, ready to try their luck for the journey to Jerusalem; their crossing of Europe had followed the pattern set by Ignatius, *on foot and begging* [Au 93]. On arriving in the city of the canals, *they split up and went to serve in various almshouses or hospitals* [Au 93], but God was waiting at every corner for them.

Somewhat later, on reaching Rome, the companions – full of desires to offer their services to the Pope and to travel to the Holy Land – insisted on joining in solidarity with the starving poor and suffered the worst consequences of the famine raging at the time (end of 1537 and 1538). The money they were able to collect through begging was allotted to help those most in need. Very often for these first Jesuits, the principal apostolate was to provide rest, food and warmth. While in Rome they began to face up realistically to the difficulties of a journey to the Holy Land: for the first time in many years no ship could set sail for Jerusalem because of the danger from war with the Turks. Thus, in line with the vows made at Montmartre [Au 85], the companions went to offer themselves to the Pope, ready to be sent wherever he might think was most needed. As a result the group, united by their past experiences and by the project they were outlining together, began to split up geographically.

Gradually structures began to fall into place for these men, now priests, who had felt the joy and enthusiasm of a shared experience, and their loving charity became more effective. They wanted above all to bring peace and reconciliation as their first priority, peace between families, between groups, and between towns and regions. Then they devoted themselves to the apostolate in almshouses and hospitals, talking, encouraging and hearing confessions, but also cleaning, making beds, and serving meals. A further commitment was to prisoners and those sentenced to death: consoling, quietening, converting, and interceding with those in authority. These were ways of bringing a sense of dignity to situations that were often inhuman in prisons and galleys. The setting up of the House of Santa Martha for the social rehabilitation of prostitutes [Au 98] shows how intent Ignatius was on finding a remedy for an alarming situation in cities like Rome and Venice. The House of Santa Martha came to be a model for others that were set up in various cities.

Nor did the first Jesuits neglect the little ones, orphans and abandoned children: in 1541 they started what was called the *Society of Orphans*, which soon inspired similar institutions, and there were hospices, run by Jesuits, which looked after orphans and the children of prostitution.

It is inspiring to see how creative the first companions of Ignatius were. They knew how to combine ministries that were more explicitly *spiritual* (spiritual exercises, the liturgy, sacramental practice), with others that were academic, and especially with those that were directly works of hands-on charity. It is also a challenge for us today to continue learning from Ignatius how to combine social contacts with realms of power and influence (popes, nobles, business circles) with those that bind one to the poor and helpless, areas to which undoubtedly Ignatius gave the best of himself.

This tendency towards the emarginated was subsumed for ever in the method and experience of the *Exercises*. Every person of good will who comes with the desire to *feel and relish God* in the Ignatian way will find him or herself face to face with *Christ Our Lord before me on the cross* [SpEx 53], as the answer to the absurdity and meaninglessness of our sin (mine and that of the world). Such a person will be on the road to prayer [Au 98], a prayer in which one offers to endure *utter poverty, both actual and spiritual* from the depth of one's heart, on condition that one is close to the Lord. Such a person will also meet the omnipotence of a God who *comes to be born in extreme poverty and... after hunger, thirst, heat and cold, etc. dies on the cross, and all of this for me* [SpEx 116]. Ignatius wishes to lead the retreatant to identification with Jesus, who invites everyone *to the highest spiritual poverty* [SpEx 46]: there, as happened for Ignatius himself, all will be decided. At the decisive moment of the *Exercises*, when the retreatant is before God, attentive to the voice that will reply to the question, *What do you want of me?* Ignatius invites him/her to want and choose *poverty with Christ poor... and ignominy with Christ in great ignominy*. It is here that the irrationality of love and the madness of understanding that this is one way of going through life *thought a fool and an idiot* in following Christ, find their expression.

Ignatius went for the final embrace with the Father on 31 July 1556. He had seen approval given to the Society of Jesus and to his spir-

itual method, the *Spiritual Exercises*. All the first versions of the *Constitutions* of the Society had been completed. The number of Jesuits had risen to almost 1000, and some 66 educational institutes and houses of formation were spreading the *Ignatian charism* throughout the world, much of it only just revealed in the sixteenth century.

Time was needed for Ignatius, and his legacy, the Society of Jesus, to integrate the profound insights of his spiritual method, the *Spiritual Exercises*: a deep spiritual experience and an effective contribution on behalf of human dignity to *bring about the redemption of the human race* [SpEx 107]. It is our love for the poor that *makes us friends of the Eternal King*. It is largely this realization that makes sense of Ignatius's famous principle: all *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, everything for the greater glory of God.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

*The terms are not listed in alphabetical order but rather so that the reader may increase his/her understanding of Ignatian spirituality by following the terms in this sequence.*

**1. JESUS** Jesus is the great protagonist of Ignatian spirituality. Nothing makes sense without Jesus. Jesus is present in the beginning of the conversion of Ignatius in Loyola through a famous book *Vita Christi*, given to him to read while he was recovering from illness. Fascinated by Jesus, Ignatius began to understand himself before him as a working servant and as a faithful friend. The vocation of the Jesuit is built up in Jesus. He is the *Way*, the foundation of the *Exercises*, the *Truth* and the meaning which give consistency to *History*, and the *Life* which transforms my life through unceasing contemplation. My life ultimately becomes incorporated into the *Life* which is Jesus, thanks to what Ignatius called *interior knowledge* of the Lord which enables us to love him more and follow him more closely. If there is something which Ignatius did not offer for discussion or consultation, it was the name of the new Religious Order *which we wish to be distinguished by the name of Jesus*. The *Pilgrim* following the steps of Jesus is the core metaphor of Ignatius' autobiography.

**2. AUTOBIOGRAPHY** This is a text written by the Portuguese Jesuit, Fr Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, to whom Ignatius narrated his biography during the last months of his life in Rome (1555-1556). The account preserved is brief: it tells the *adventures* of the Pilgrim in Europe and the Holy Land until he settled in Rome (1539), and above all, it communicates a spiritual, mystical itinerary of his geographical exodus and *exile* from the time of his first conversion in Loyola, the more intense and mystical stay in Manresa, up to the stage of spiritual maturity in Rome, once the Society of Jesus had been founded.

**3. ACCOMPANIMENT** In Ignatian spirituality, *to accompany* fundamentally means helping the other to find him/herself more easily and spontaneously with the God of his/her Life. This is achieved through listening, through conversation, through a word or a question here and there. The relationship of accompaniment includes a shared search for God as its principal objective and it implicitly includes reorganization of one's life. The fruit of such a relationship gradually makes itself felt, among other things, in growing freedom and in the experience of consolation. Accompaniment is especially significant and valuable during the experience of the Spiritual Exercises, in the personal and shared discernment that shapes us as *friends in the Lord*.

**4. FRIENDSHIP** One of the greatest conversions of St Ignatius of Loyola was towards friendship. At first, he was committed to furthering his project of following Christ *alone* and then the Lord gradually led him to think about his present and future in a group, in *company (society)* so as to *help souls* more and better. Sincere companionship, rooted in common friendship with Jesus, characterized the first group of companions who gathered in Paris and who eventually founded the *Society of Jesus* (1540). On one occasion, Ignatius defined this group as of *friends in the Lord* because all agreed in him and in the desire of *loving him more and following him more*.

**5. SOCIETY OF JESUS** The name given to the group or Religious Institution founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and nine of his companions who came together in the University of Paris from 1528 onwards. The group presented itself to Pope Paul III with the desire *to be sent* anywhere in the whole world known at the time where there was greater need. This absolute availability and mobility remained manifest in the group through a vow of *special obedience to the Pope* concerning its missions. The body also had unique characteristics: not to have the *choir* (that is, reciting the divine office together), nor institutionalised practices of *devotion*. Its name of *Jesus* comes from a profound, religious experience of Ignatius, perhaps that on the way to Rome where *he met* Jesus carrying the

cross, asking him to serve him. The Society of Jesus is a religious, apostolic order of active life, founded on the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the purpose of which is to *help souls*. Today there are around 20,000 Jesuits in five continents, serving the greater community of the global Church.

**6. CHURCH** Ignatian spirituality has some very clear, profoundly ecclesial features. Early on, Ignatius understood the importance of the Church as a mediator for gauging his projects and decisions: his firm desire and solid plans to remain in Jerusalem were radically frustrated when the Roman *bulls* authorizing the Franciscan authorities in Jerusalem to force pilgrims to return home, were about to be shown to him. Ignatius obeyed the order of expulsion without waiting to be shown these bulls. This was a sign of trust in the Church. This experience is reflected in the *Exercises*, in election (all things elected must be in line with the doctrine of our Holy Mother, the Church), as well as in the rules for feeling with the Church which aim to *educate* the sensibility of retreatants to awaken in them an affection for and construction of their vocation *in* the Church. According to the foundation documents, the Society of Jesus has a vocation of service *to the only Lord and to the Church his Spouse under the Roman Pontiff (Formula 1550)*, a vocation manifested in a *special vow* by which the Jesuit obliges himself to execute ... immediately ... everything the Roman Pontiff orders him to do.

**7. AVAILABILITY (DISPONIBILITY)** A basic attitude of Ignatian spirituality is *being available* to be sent anywhere, to respond with generosity to the *Will of God* here and now, always directing one's free will towards *helping the neighbour*. The first companions made this availability explicit in the vows of Montmartre (August 15, 1534) when they promised to *present themselves to the Vicar of Christ so that he could employ them as he judged to be the greatest glory of God*. The companions wished to make the attitude of availability a distinctive feature of the Society introducing the so-called *fourth vow*, of special obedience to the Pope to be sent to *any part of the world without subterfuges or any excuse*. Sincere avail-

ability lies at the core of every exercise of apostolic obedience and presupposes it. Fr Pedro Arrupe referred to availability as *the heart of our identity*. Its theological foundation lies in the experience of the *Exercises*, in the contemplation of the life of Jesus, obedient and available to the Will of the Father *who sent him*. Therefore, a life of prayer is crucial.

**8. PRAYER** In Ignatian spirituality, prayer is closely linked to history and with the world, which frequently constitute its preferred subject. On the one hand, Ignatian prayer contemplates God working in the world through Jesus (he walked around *doing good*) and on the other hand, it contemplates the world as a *divine means* or place where God works (dwells, labours), actively giving life. This charisma springs in great measure from Ignatius' so-called *illumination of the Cardoner* (Manresa 1522) where by a mystical intuition *the whole world appeared to him as something new* and he understood history as a *theological place*. Out of this understanding of prayer flows the meaning and value of all work of Jesuit ministries around the world, undertaken in collaboration with the unceasing and generous activity of God the worker. So prayer is one of the favoured means to *seek and find God*. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are his most refined instrument to serve this goal.

**9. SPIRITUAL EXERCISES** In the Jesuit context, we know the *Spiritual Exercises* as a brief manual (about 50 pages) written by Ignatius of Loyola on the basis of his personal experiences after leaving Loyola (1522) up until his arrival in Rome 1537. The Exercises are for *ordering life* according to God's plan for each one of us and towards eliminating any obstacles to that plan. The method includes numerous forms of prayer (meditation, contemplation, application of the senses, repetitions, colloquies...) and requires the attention of the whole person in a context of retreat and silence. The process is divided into four parts, called *weeks*, which progress from meditation of conversion and of one's own sin to contemplation of God in the world, to discover him in each and every event and circumstance. The continued contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ (from Bethlehem to Golgotha), so as to identify

oneself with him, is the preferred means to attain the end we wish to attain. The *Exercises*, from their origin in Paris onwards, have been the foundation of the charisma of the Society of Jesus and they continue to be the first source of inspiration of Ignatian spirituality today.

**10. PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION (PF)** This is the name given to some brief paragraphs at the beginning of the *Exercises*. They offer a framework about how to experience not only the Exercises, but one's whole life. These are dense paragraphs which make explicit the human *origin* (human beings have been created, that is, received, invited to the world); the *goal* of human life (to praise, revere and serve God, that is, to understand the character, lovingly *altered*, of my existence in permanent relationship to God); the *milieu* in which human beings live. The last signifies all things which are seen, valued and experienced from a divine perspective as means to attain the goal of human life. PF reminds us, throughout life, that we come from God and that to live consists in an infinite pilgrimage of returning to God through praise and service in history.

**11. INCARNATION** Ignatian spirituality is a way of understanding the Following of Christ in the world, in history. It has been described as a *worldly spirituality*. Once the stage of the *first conversion of the heart* has been passed, the *Exercises* place the retreatant in the phase of *being sent to the world*, to work and live with and like the Lord. The God of Ignatius is the God-Trinity who decides to send the Son to the world to *make redemption*. That is why Following of Christ is understood as associating oneself with, grafting oneself to this plan of God the Father as collaborators or *servants of the Mission of Christ* (GC 34, d2), working and living according to his way: *like I*, insists Jesus with those who want to follow him. Ignatian spirituality intends to live the consequences of the Incarnation of the Son up to the last, imitating his style as *poor, humble and humiliated, in great poverty* according to the conditions in Bethlehem, up to death on the Cross. In the course of the Spiritual Exercises we contemplate various passages of Jesus' life.

**12. CONTEMPLATION** This method of prayer consists in involving the imagination (*imaginative gaze or look*) in a special way, so as to enter with one's whole being into *that mystery of the life of Jesus*. This method is used very frequently in the so-called Second and Third Weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises* when the retreatant is advised to *contemplate* Jesus from incarnation and childhood up to his death on the Cross. The objective of this method is to gradually identify oneself with Jesus and to transform oneself in him, adopting his very sentiments, convictions and values. Retreatants express this in an explicit way in their repeated prayer of petition for *internal knowledge of the Lord so as to better love and follow him*.

**13. CONTEMPLATIVE IN ACTION** This expression formulates the ideal of spiritual life *in the Ignatian way*. A companion of Ignatius, Jerome Nadal (1507-1580) coined the expression, understanding the Jesuit to be *in actione contemplativus*. In living this spirituality, the barriers of times and *sacred* places are broken down and life, history and the world are all understood to be places and opportunities for prayer, for union with God. Ignatius' companions assimilated this spirit rapidly. Pierre Favre, one of the first Jesuit companions of Ignatius, describes how prayer enlightens action and how, in turn, action animates contemplation. This is a charisma we have to ask for; it is the peak of so-called *contemplation to attain Love* in the Exercises, a love which is present in the *action* of God giving himself in and for the world, for me.

**14. SERVICE** Ignatian spirituality is geared toward an active mysticism, in other words, a mysticism of service. Initially influenced, perhaps, by his mentality acquired as a knight at the service of the King, and in keeping with his conversion, Ignatius understood himself to be a *servant* before God and desired to do *great exploits* for him. With time, he became aware that all his action was only a response to *so much good received which you have given me*, and therefore, he could only give it back (*to you, Oh Lord, I give it back*). *To do* is to serve the Divine Majesty: it is a way of integrating all activities into a relationship with God, a means of communicating with him through action. For Ignatius of Loyola *service* is

closely linked with *love*; it is a way of loving, of showing love, of making the love we have effective. It necessarily leads us to do something for the Loved One, specifically what we have discovered he wants us to do. For Ignatius, to live is *in all to love and serve*, souls and people.

**15. HELPING SOULS** This expression reflects one of the most profound Ignatian motivations. Ignatian spirituality, apostolic and active from its very origin, seeks to exercise influence on the world, to transform history. The final objective of this influence and transformation is *to help* the neighbour to seek and find more worthy, more human lifestyles which are rooted in the Gospel. Every process of *Ignatian* discernment should culminate in action which benefits our brothers and helps them to discover the ultimate meaning of their lives in *service and praise* of their Creator and Lord. Even if Jesuits were interested in providing support of a *spiritual* nature, right from the very beginning they were intensely concerned about the holistic care of people: they worked in hospitals, in prisons, on behalf of abandoned children and with prostitutes. Ignatius always sought to give the utmost support possible: the more universal, the more evangelical, attending to more urgent needs, being at the service of the neediest people. This is the Ignatian *more* (magis).

**16. THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD** One of the most significant and well-known Ignatian maxims is *to the greater glory of God*. It sums up the whole desire of one who seeks at all times and in all circumstances to act with good intentions, that is, according to the desire which orientates his/her whole life. This is described in the *Principle and Foundation* of the *Spiritual Exercises*: all is *for the greater glory of God* if it is in his *service and praise*. For Ignatius, living according to the principle of the Glory of God is the expression of a grateful response to the way of being of God who is *infinite and Supreme Goodness*. It is a way of *praising him* which energizes the person *to serve him* by exercising influence in history, by helping the neighbours *of the whole world* to attain salvation, *to save and perfect their souls*. For Ignatius the *Glory of*

God coincides with the *benefit and help to souls*: the glory of God and human glory, therefore, frequently appear to be closely bound together. Seeking the greater glory of God and of human beings is often a difficult task: it requires discernment.

**17. DISCERNMENT** This is a Spiritual Exercise which enables a person (or community) to intuit and to know the will of God through observation and analysis of the interior motions (of consolation or desolation). The aim of the Exercise, then, is to orientate one's life towards the fulfilment of God's will. The discernment of *spirits* was a particularly significant experience of Ignatius of Loyola during the first stages of his conversion (Loyola and Manresa). It necessarily implies self-knowledge and clear awareness to see through possible *deceits and fallacies* which prevent genuine following of the Lord right up to the last consequences. Thanks to discernment, followers of Christ may adjust themselves in the *agitated waters* of the internal and external world, always keeping before them the objective of *seeking and finding God in all things*. All the teachings of Ignatius of Loyola (arising from his experience and his knowledge) are expressed in the *22 Rules to perceive and to understand the various motions which are caused in the soul* and which are present in the book of the *Exercises*. So-called *examination* is one of the most important tools in discernment.

**18. EXAMINATION** One of the most typical Spiritual Exercises is the *examination* which we already find at the beginning of the *Exercises*. At the time of his convalescence in Loyola, Ignatius spent long hours *absorbed or lost* in his fantasies and imaginations *thinking* what he had to do for the lady of his thoughts and what he had to do for Christ. At a given moment *his eyes were opened somewhat* and he became aware that these thoughts of contrary cause and effect led to diverse emotional repercussions: some brought him closer to the project of Jesus through consolation and others drew him away because of desolation, leaving him *dry and sad*. In Ignatian spirituality, examination consists of *praying with the life lived* to give thanks for it, to discover the path of God and of the Holy Spirit through it and to recognize impediments and difficul-

ties in the way of God's work *in me*, which I place there consciously or unconsciously. The assiduous practice of examination leads a person to familiarise him/herself with the movements of his/her interior world (motions), to guide him/her as correctly as possible in taking decisions and not allowing him/herself to be led astray by motivations of *the evil spirit*, which prevent the building of the Kingdom in this world. Examination is a powerful help to serve God by making good choices.

**19. ELECTION** One of the most original and genuine contributions of Ignatius of Loyola to western spiritual tradition is the development of a simple and clear method *to make a healthy and good election* (choice). Ignatius starts out from the conviction that human beings are capable of knowing the Will of God in their life because they have been created in his image and likeness. Humans may then ask themselves: *My God, what do you want from me?* And they decide on the most appropriate place for them in the world from the intuited response. Ignatius develops this method in the book of *Exercises* in three instances: analysis of sentiments and affections, analysis of thoughts, and the feeling of the soul after projective techniques. Everything within the human being can contribute to listening to God to discern his will. Sometimes, the election is clear, and we know *without any doubt*, that we are following God's will, given to us in the very process of discernment. Gradually, a habit of indifference grows, reflecting our commitment to approach and perceive all things and experiences from the perspective of God's presence.

**20. INDIFFERENCE** Indifference (not to be understood in the conventional sense of the word to mean apathy) is a habit of the heart, a global attitude to life offered to the follower of Jesus as the key to understand the relationship with the world. Having experienced that God fills the human heart to the brim, *all other things on earth* acquire their meaning and value *for me in relationship to my and their Creator and Lord*. Through the transparency and detachment which spring from indifference, we perceive that all things in the world are ultimately *creature[s]* like ourselves, where

God's love dwells and whose final vocation He is. When the world is understood in this way, from the viewpoint of radical fraternity in Christ, indifference becomes the source of human freedom, of the preferential commitment to the neediest, and of God's joy in us and in the community (consolation). This unfolds in the *Contemplation to Attain Love*, at the end of the *Spiritual Exercises*. There we ask to always live in the grace of *internal knowledge of such goods received, so that we ourselves, in full gratitude, may in everything love and serve.*



Xavier Garcia i Marfí







*To join JRS is to embark on a journey of faith accompanied by refugees (JRS seminar, Kigali, 1995). Over the years, JRS workers have reflected on the spiritual values represented by refugees, what message they have to share with JRS and the rest of the world. This spontaneous search for meaning echoes a need voiced several times over, for greater emphasis on and definition of aspects of the faith, the cornerstone on which JRS is built.*

*God in Exile: Towards a Shared Spirituality with Refugees* evolved precisely as a response to this need. It is a compilation of reflections from a spiritual perspective shared by people – religious, lay people and refugees – who are part of the JRS mission. It does not pretend to be the final answer in what is essentially a process; rather it is a step in the journey towards discovering, together with refugees, a spirituality arising out of the experience of forced exile and the specific faith-based response of JRS.

This book does not attempt to idealize the experience of displacement. Ultimately, however, a resolve reveals itself, rising above the hardships described to meet the challenge of finding out how God is present in the suffering of exile.

ISBN 88-88126-02-3

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