



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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The Poetry of Pandemics, Politics, and Prayer

Dear Mission Friends:

Throughout history, at times of heightened sensitivity, particularly sadness, suffering, or stress, we have often turned to the language of heightened sensitivity: Poetry. Whether we read the work of others or write it ourselves, poetry can be comforting and healing, articulating our blurred thoughts and feelings, shedding light on the darkness.

As you know, Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our long-time missionary in Rabinal, Guatemala, who sees and attempts to alleviate corruption and suffering on a daily basis, always begins his reports with a thought-provoking poetic reflection. I have included in this month's newsletter two of his most recent works that will give you pause.

Peace,
Lesley Warnshuis

It Happened in 2020

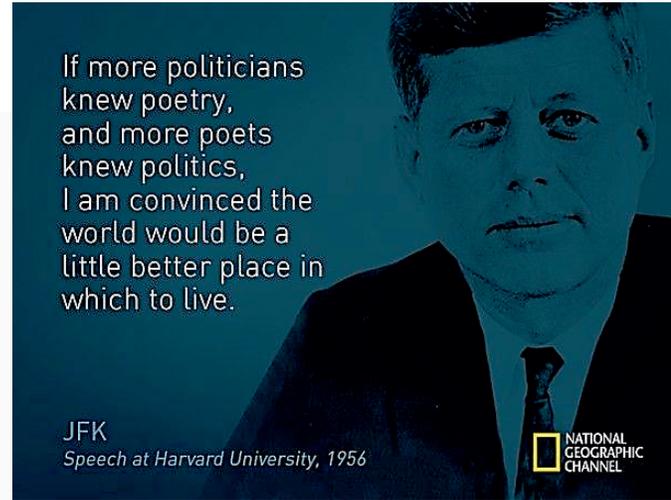
Jesus is the truth, the way, and the life.
To know the only truth,
The truth God reveals,
We must stop wishing there was another.
One God, one truth, and we must find it.



Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

It happened in 2020.
The virus did it. It kept us away from each other.
But at the same time we felt loved even by those we didn't know,
who put up a shield to protect us.
And we all embraced the need and the desire to care for others,
the most fragile.
Did you think that would ever happen?
Then the New Year arrived behind a mask, hard to recognize.
No one could name it, other than "the year after the no year."

Today though, we are no longer unrecognizable or untouchable.
We are still fragile, dependent, needy, and helpless, but loved.



If more politicians
knew poetry,
and more poets
knew politics,
I am convinced the
world would be a
little better place in
which to live.

JFK
Speech at Harvard University, 1956



The light eternal dawned to awaken the sleeping genius.
Springing to action, He sent us his Spirit to guide us to
a truth.
The great Knower, the great Lover, the simple Cause,
He who made us and in whom we live,
Revealed himself once again to the searchers of truth,
His beloved children of reason and hope in a world
That is intelligent and reasonable.
The humble searchers of truth set out in the darkest cave
To find the exit, the weak point of a deadly enemy.
They threw their only weapon—the belief in a world of
truth,
A world made with a blueprint—and found a path through
the labyrinth.
Thanks be to God for his gift to unravel mysteries.

Jesus is the truth, the way, and the life.
To know the only truth,
The truth God reveals,
We must stop wishing there was another.
One God, one truth, and we must live it.

In the Time of Plague

We keep indoors. When we dare to venture out
 We are cautious. Our neighbors smile, but in their eyes there is
 Reserve and suspicion. They keep their distance, as we do ours,
 In mute accord. Much of our fear is unspoken, for there is
 At last the weight of custom, the tender of rote consolation.
 We endure thoughts of demise, measure the distance of death.
 Death too wears a mask. But consider, there may well be good
 In our misfortune if we can find it. It is hidden in the darkness
 Of our fear. But discover it and see that it is hope and more;
 It is the gift of opportunity. We have the rare chance to prevail,
 To pose a resolution for world renewal:
We can be better than we have ever been.
We can improve the human condition.
We can imagine, then strive to realize,
Our potential for goodness and morality.
We can overcome pestilence, war and poverty.
We can preserve our sacred purpose.
We can determine who we are in our essential nature
And who we can be. We are committed to this end
 For our own sake and for the sake of those who will come after.
 There is a better future, and we can secure it.
 Let us take up the task and be worthy of our best destiny.

~N. SCOTT MOMADAY



Light rises in the darkness for the upright;
 the Lord is gracious, merciful and righteous.
 It is well with the man who deals generously and lends,
 who conducts his affairs with justice.
 For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered
 forever. He is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is firm,
 trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid,
 until he sees his desire on his adversaries. He has distributed
 freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures
 forever. ~Psalm 112: 4-9

*St. Martin, from you we learn how to be
 dedicated and unselfish.
 You teach us to avoid idleness and self-seeking.
 Give us some of that spirit of penance which you had,
 so that we may be constant in the struggle
 with temptation. Ask Jesus crucified and Mary,
 the Queen of Martyrs, to give us the grace
 to fight the good fight. Amen.*



*Top, a little girl
 peeking into her
 "window" in a village
 outside Rabinal;
 center, her abuela
 preparing to venture
 out; left, only part of a
 long line for the
 vaccine.*

Freedom from Covid—Is That All We Need?

~Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P.

A frantic headlong rush to pull away from the murderous Covid,
From the constant drumbeat of investigation into its origins,
Into the intrigues of the government's involvement in its funding,
The never ending analysis of what could and did go wrong
In the face of a life threatening danger—
Who can doubt it was a real threat with 600,000 deaths
And a massive commitment to assist the sick
With the true strength of an unlimited hopefulness in science
And the desire of a great country to prove itself?
Yet why do we not take relief in our great success of a vaccine
But only lament our losses,
While the whole world is passing through the same ordeal?

No wonder we rush ahead, free at last to breathe unfiltered air.
It is tempting to drop all blame for the lies of bureaucratic scientists
Who put their thumb on the scales to hide their own complicity.
It is too painful to find ourselves the victims abused by authority,
To admit we were helpless to find the truth.
Is there no justice for those who hide the truth?

We want to forget the recent past, longing to return to the way it was—
Life as it was meant to be, the peaceful, ever-same reality.
Have we come all this way only to go back to what used to be?
Have we learned nothing?
What is the normal we hope to go back to?
Have we and the world not changed to make that impossible?

Our military might will protect us from all invaders,
But viruses fly under the radar and bring us to our knees.
Our great economic engine will produce all the chemistry
And techniques to control an invasion,
But variants keep coming from places unheard of,
Places where no one is protected and there are not enough vaccines.
We cannot be protected if all are not protected.

The world really is one economy; boundaries are lines in the sand.
There is one human family.
We cannot be safe until all are safe.
Have we not learned that yet?

We are at a true crossroad of history for those with eyes to see.
Today a new world order is debated in the halls of government
But it is already being practiced by most of the world:
Existence on the most simple level.
Could that be what they mean by a green new deal?
Do we need to go back to where most of the world is now?
Do you believe you could live such a life?

Early morning, maybe 6:30 AM, before stores are open,
An elderly fellow with sandals made of tire tread
Passes by my office leading a half dozen cows,
Some black and white, others brown and white, with big horns,
Along with baby calves and a couple of dogs who accompany them,
Headed to the mountainsides about a mile away.
They know where they are going; they go every day.



Top, mom and daughter making masks to sell; center, waiting in line at a distribution center for food and supplies; below, women returning to their village to share food from the center.



According to *Oxfam*, starvation due to COVID-19 could cause more deaths than the disease itself, as a result of disruption to food production and supplies, diminishing aid, and mass unemployment. And women are more likely to suffer from COVID-linked hunger because of their lower economic status.

Freedom from Covid (cont.)

Then at 4 PM the same fellow leads them back,
Leaving a trail of dung on this dirt street but it melds in.
Other trails are left on the streets in early morning,
But these look like rabbit droppings or like a sack of beans fell.
A pastor of eight or so she-goat, all roped in tandem, passes by.
He hollers out that goat milk is ready to be dispensed.
People appear with their cups or pans and he milks the goats.
It is fresh and warm.

I leave at 7 AM to go get my four tortillas
From a woman who has a small sign outside her business:
"Tortillas tres veces al dia" (Tortillas three times a day).
The *tortillerias* are almost always the smallest, poorest places--
There are hundreds—Just a wooden shack or tiny room with a ceramic plate
Three feet in radius above a wood fire and a pipe to divert the smoke
There is usually no light or windows and the heat is oppressive.
I take my cloth which they fold around the four tortillas.
I pay 14 cents. I buy my range-raised eggs for 16 cents apiece;
My bananas cost 8 cents each. I can live on \$5 a day if I live simply:
Beans, rice, tortillas, squash or leafy vegetables, fruit and water;
The added proteins come from cheese, eggs, milk, and peanuts;
And of course, chile, which adds the spice that keeps people healthy.
On big occasions we splurge on tamales with a sliver of pork or chicken.

Not everyone can be so lucky to live this life
With fresh air and home grown food—toasting your own coffee;
Picking bananas or apples from your own fruit trees;
Taking your water jar to the village well and pumping five gallons;
Searching for fallen branches of dead wood a few hours away in the hills,
And then gathering and cutting it, stacking and tying it into a bundle,
And carrying it home on your back for the day's firewood.
A blessed life but a lot of work to nourish and maintain a family.

Of course there are problems that need solving:
All day long people are carrying their firewood to their houses
So forests are barren of any underbrush or fallen branches,
Which turns out to be an advantage for fires,
Not to mention the temptation to cut down existing trees.
There is no Paradise left and we have been thrown out to sweat.

You say you want to go back to normal.
That is the real normal today in most of the world.
You don't accept it? You will when there is nothing better.
If there is something better, we must make it happen for everyone.
But what must first change is to think we can live in isolation,
Behind our secure border, while the rest of the world suffers want.
We need laws to enforce border security, but we need
A world economic and political order based on reason.

The USA cannot solve the global crisis alone.
May Catholic social teaching continue to influence the world.
The Dominican order and other religious societies in the Church
Do play an important role in acting globally.
But each parish, each family, each person needs to be part of the effort.
The Church is universal, catholic, and must think globally.
It has done so in phenomenal ways in the past, ways that must be recalled,
Revealed and resurrected. We need to mirror true freedom and democracy
That is based on the innate value of each human life and freedom for all.



Mission Appeals are back, sort of...

***If you are in the area,
please come and hear our friars preach.***

**July 24-25: Corpus Christi, Fremont,
Fr. Michael Fones, OP**

***Aug. 7-8: Nativity, Torrance, Fr. Martin Walsh, OP**

**Aug. 21-22: Good Shepherd, Pittsburg ,
Fr. Timothy Conlan, OP**

Sept. 18-19: St. Theodore, Gonzales, Fr. Martin

***pre-recorded sermon**