

Mission Appeal Sunday
Archdiocese of Chicago
2 August 2020

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Hunger is a huge problem that the world is facing. Today's gospel presents Jesus as a person in solidarity with those who are hungry. His disciples propose that either the people themselves find food or someone else should feed them. But that is not how Jesus wants to deal with the problem at hand. Jesus wants to do something about it *then and there, and with what is available*. He wants to show the disciples that the solution is already there.

I am Father Joseph Jeyaseelan. I belong to the Congregation of Claretian Missionaries. I would like to share with you about a parish in a remote corner of Sri Lanka which needs your prayer and support.

Sri Lanka is an island nation in South Asia. The Catholic population is less than 8% of the country's population of 21 million people. The country is divided into 12 dioceses. We Claretian Missionaries work in five of these dioceses. All our parishes are located in remote areas. This is an option we have made "to go to the peripheries," as Pope Francis asked.

This year we have taken up a long-neglected parish in the Diocese of Jaffna, in the northern region of Sri Lanka. The 26-year-long civil war was the reason for the neglect. The place is called Mallavi. It was a center stage in the battle between the Tamil Tigers and Government troops. Thousands of people lost their lives. Lots of others have become handicapped. People there have

undergone the trauma of the war and displacement, losing lives and properties.

The parish territory is geographically vast, with eight substations. Each one has a chapel. The priest is busy throughout the week, traveling on a motorbike to these substations to offer daily or Sunday Masses. The rectory is in a dilapidated condition with cracks and leaks. The pastor and the deacon collaborating with him live with many privations.

Many of the families are headed by women. Their men were killed when they were forcibly recruited to fight in the war against the powerful Sri Lankan army. So, poverty, hunger, lack of opportunities for employment, and lack of educational facilities are huge problems that we must deal with.

People depend primarily on agriculture to earn a living. But farming is not easy in Mallavi, as the crops are destroyed by wild elephants, and monkeys. The government has failed to address this problem, so the people are forced to deal with it themselves.

In this context, we are creating opportunities for women-headed families to earn a living, training them in sewing and knitting. Supporting them in starting home-based poultry. And, for the children, focusing on their advancement through education.

The previous parish priests have done well in the area of faith formation. People attend Mass and various other parish activities as a result. There is a vacuum, however, regarding social, educational, and economic improvement because the former pastors lacked funds, just as we do now.

We want to do everything possible to bring people closer to God, and form them in gospel values. At the same time, we would like to address the problem of poverty, hunger, and unemployment.

We could easily say people should look after this themselves like the disciples in today's gospel, but we would rather have Jesus' attitude instead, and the disposition to do what we can.

Hence, I ask you, my dear sisters and brothers, to pray for the people of Mallavi, and their pastors. Your readiness to share with your brothers and sisters in a disadvantaged and underprivileged situation can bring a smile to some faces in a remote corner of the globe.

We cannot solve all the problems that people around the world are facing. But we can do something. We can bring to Jesus the little we have. Like a child bringing to Jesus five loaves and two fish, the little that is placed in Jesus' hands is always a lot.

May his love inspire us to care and share! God bless you!