

WEEK 2: THE CANDLE OF *Peace*

“A gift is not truly a gift if something is expected in return, unless of course, the gift is peace.” Unfortunately, the author’s name was not included in the photograph of this slogan which was prominently displayed at a yard sale. Still, it helps me to understand what Monseñor Oscar Romero meant when he spoke the following words in his sermon on Epiphany Sunday in January 1978.

Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.
Peace is dynamism.
Peace is generosity.

It is right and it is duty.

Archbishop Oscar Romero spoke out on behalf of the poor and oppressed people of El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s before he was shot to death while preaching, calling Christians, even Christian soldiers, to obey God’s higher order of peacebuilding. The mural pictured here represents the important role Romero and the church played in the Salvadoran struggle for peace.

But we are in the Season of Advent, not Epiphany. Perhaps this is the point. The Season of Advent anticipates the Celebration of Epiphany when we fully acknowledge the revelation of God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ – God’s full disclosure of Himself to us, with us and at work amongst us. How will the world know this truth? Monseñor Romero declares that it is through God’s children’s generous and dutiful acts of peace for the sake of others – “the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.”

The significance of my “duty” to daily practice the discipline of generous peace contributions has recently come through the work of my CBM colleague, Rev. Gato Munyamasoko. He drew my attention to Matthew 5:9 which says that it is through our generous practices of peace that we “will be called children of God.”

Rev. Munyamasoko has been developing a curriculum resource, a series of twelve modules, to help followers of Christ live out this mandate. I have been working alongside him, virtually, (as he is currently living in Gisenyi, Rwanda), editing, referencing, clarifying, wondering, confessing, embracing and formatting the learning he desires to share with African countries through Christ followers there.

The curriculum resource is rooted in Rev. Gato’s life experience as a child of God called to foster peace and reconciliation. Born of Rwandan refugee parents in the Congo and influenced by the Canadian Baptist peacebuilding ministry of Rev. João Matwawana, Gato started a peacebuilding program in the Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda (AEBR). The focus was to help people to be healed from trauma, specifically, the trauma resulting from the genocide. With the support of CBM in 2012, the peacebuilding program expanded to Kenya with CBM partners and also in the Congo.

Throughout the years, the learning he has been privileged to receive has exposed him to many books by many authors on the many facets of peace and reconciliation. He is grateful for these opportunities and they have given him even more passion and experience to see the children of God engage in the daily discipline of peacebuilding.

Today, he continues to pursue his passion for peacebuilding and reconciliation. CBM has made it possible for him to return to the Congo to accompany the Baptist Community in East Congo (CEBCE) in their process of reunification after 21 years of division. And, CBM has encouraged him to author these modules that they may be a resource to the church in Africa.

God does indeed work through his people, people like Gato Munyamasoko, Oscar Romero and even you and me. It is through peace, the “the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all” that we will be recognized as God’s children.

Prayer:

Generous God, it is my deepest desire to be your child – to be called as such by you and to be known as such by others. You have told me that for this to be so, I must be a person who practices peace.

Forgive me for the many moments in which I missed the opportunity to be generous in my peace-giving.

Open my eyes to see when the gift of peace is mine for the offering.

Soften my spirit that I may relinquish that part of me that deems another as not being worthy of the gift of peace.

Make my words full of your peace-giving intent and design my actions that you, the Prince of Peace, may be made flesh again and again and again.

All for your glory, Amen.