

FAITH *in* CONFLICTS



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FAITH DIMENSIONS

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In times of war, faith is not a shelter. It is a call.

‘We are already in the third world war, even if it is fought piecemeal: in sections, in distinct areas, but globally we are at war.’

(Pope Francis, Redipuglia, 13 September 2014)

We are living in times marked by wars and conflicts that are devastating many countries in the world and which, unfortunately, to this day, show no sign of ending.

Pope Francis, on several occasions, has spoken of today's condition of the world as a **‘third world war fought in piecemeal’**; it is no longer a matter of a single great war like the two World Wars that characterised the first half of the 20th century, but of a series of interconnected violences: forgotten wars, humanitarian crises, persecutions, forced migrations, social and structural inequalities that especially affect the weakest and poorest.

This awareness led us to develop a project titled Faith in Conflict, a collection of testimonies that arise from the encounter between the profound desire **to find God in all things**, as St Ignatius wrote (*Spiritual Exercises*, no. 23), and the concrete reality of those who, every day, live their faith amidst the deafening noise of weapons, injustice, and the deprivation of freedom and dignity of every human being.

Two essential questions resonate at the heart of this work: How can people live and bear witness to the faith in contexts where peace is unknown, where every form of freedom is denied, and where equality is only a utopia? Is it possible to believe, to embrace the Gospel and allow ourselves to be transformed by God's word there too?

The voices we have collected—testimonies, reflections, poems—do not offer simple answers. Rather, they offer a path of discernment and contemplation. They are words born in wounded and forgotten lands where faith is never abstract but incarnate: in hands that heal, in words that comfort, in presence that encourages.

Faith can flourish in conflicts, becoming a seed of hope, a silent force for reconciliation.

This collection is intended to be both a provocation and an invitation to reflection: to let ourselves be touched, to feel reality deep inside and discern how and where the Spirit of God is already at work.

According to St Ignatius, authentic faith does not remain anchored in words but is expressed and concretised in deeds, in works to see **‘how God dwells in creatures... and in me’** (*Spiritual Exercises* 230).

It is an invitation that becomes a mission: to bear witness to the faith and make it known to those who, in the midst of so many difficulties, repeatedly ask the question ‘Where is God?’.

We hope that these pages will be an opportunity for reflection, discernment and prayer because God continues to inhabit history and calls us to recognise, serve and love Him precisely in the places and situations where He seems to be absent.

Carla Bellone
Assistant to the Secretary of the Service for Faith



Democracy, climate change, and the Social Doctrine of the Church

MAURO BOSSI SJ

The Social Doctrine of the Church is a set of teachings of the Magisterium that aim to help us interpret the events of our time, in the light of the Gospel. At this time marked by the expansion of conflicts, the decline of democracy and climate crisis, how can the teachings of Pope Francis help us? I will refer to two documents: the encyclical letter *Laudato si'* (2015) and the apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* (2023), the latter explicitly addressed to the UN Climate Conference held in Dubai.

Two important United Nations assemblies have been held in recent months: in Cali, Colombia, the Convention on Biological Diversity conference to address global biodiversity decline; in Baku, Azerbaijan, the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change conference. At both conferences, the main topic of discussion was finance: how to mobilize financial resources to enable the countries of the Global South the possibility of clean, fossil-free development. Indeed, on this depends the possibility of addressing, on a global scale, the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. At both conferences, the short-sightedness and selfishness of developed countries prevented an adequate agreement.

The real problem is not simply money but the political situation that makes or does not make these arrangements possible. This is where *Laudate Deum*, which aspires to restore international politics to its rightful role in establishing just relations among peoples, becomes interesting. Pope Francis denounces the vacuum of politics, that is, the lack of participation of the peoples and their legitimate representatives, in the construction of the future, in a scenario, in which the effects of climate change appear more and more serious and the poorest countries suffer the most severe consequences:

«The world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons [...] This is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life» (LD 2-3).

«Regrettably, the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit possible at minimal cost and in the shortest amount of time» (LD 13).

«Once and for all, let us put an end to the irresponsible derision that would present this issue as something purely ecological, “green”, romantic, frequently subject to ridicule by economic interests. Let us finally admit that it is a human and social problem on any number of levels» (LD 58).

When a just international policy based on ethics is lacking, two logics and strategies come into play.

The first is to entrust to simple market mechanisms the role of regulating the global common good that would fall to politics; the task of politics is to give space to the interests of the parties involved, to mediate conflicts, to guarantee the interests of the weakest subjects; in the case of the climate crisis, the weakest subjects par excellence are future generations; it is clear that market

mechanisms are unable to represent the interests and rights of the unborn.

The second way is the unilateral initiative of the most violent and unscrupulous politico-military players, who are flouting international law and the United Nations.

In short, we are witnessing a shift from the exercise of power in the truly political sense of the term, that is, the ability of the human community to act together and according to law, to power as the practice of violence, through military or economic means. In this moment, power ultimately belongs to those who have the means to impose their will. *Laudato si'* and *Laudate Deum* describe this logic as the “technocratic paradigm”: the illusion that the common good can be derived from the free play of power relations.

This is the perspective in which we need to put the climate and environmental discourse. We are going through the most serious crisis of multilateralism in our memory. We are experiencing the “third World War in pieces”, as pope Francis has called it. The number of civilian victims of conflicts has tripled in two years (11k in 2021, 33k in 2023). Anything that makes it possible to impose oneself on the enemy, whatever the cost, is being cleared.

Are international climate dialogues the place where hope for dialogue can open, where multilateralism can be rebuilt and renewed? We need to believe that.

«More than saving the old multilateralism, it appears that the current challenge is to reconfigure and recreate it, taking into account the new world situation. I invite you to recognize that many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in

complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights» (*Laudate Deum* 37, see also *Fratelli tutti* 175).

The environment and climate issue is also an issue of democracy and human rights. In 2023, 196 land and environment defenders were killed worldwide, mainly in South America (source: Global Witness). They gave their lives to defend their lands and communities from exploitation and political corruption. But even in Europe and North America, some climate activists face jail time or are already in jail for participating in peaceful protest actions.

Here, how do we Catholics want to exert pressure on politics? We are inside very hard conflicts, and the question is how to be in them as Christians, exercising evangelical nonviolence. But we must assume that the conflict is there and that the most vulnerable in the world are losing. We must also avoid another deception, which is to think that ecological conversion is only on the individual level. Ecological conversion is always community conversion. By building community and mobilizing community we can help make the environmental issue a problem of justice, participation and democracy.





Art Trouver Dieu en toute chose guerre

GABRIEL KHAIRALLAH SJ

La guerre me rattrape à l'âge de 55 ans. Je suis né au Liban, et j'ai passé la majeure partie de mon enfance et toute mon adolescence en mode survie à cause de la guerre qui a débuté en 1975 et qui s'est « officiellement terminée » en 1990. Vivre au Liban en temps de guerre est un luxe qui n'est pas à la portée de tous. On passe de la mode vie à la mode survie et la mort devient une habituée que l'on fréquente au quotidien.

Je suis partie en France à la fin de la guerre et à la fin de mes années à l'école secondaire pour apprendre à vivre. J'ai suivi des études universitaires, j'ai ensuite travaillé dans une entreprise privée avec de faire le saut et de suivre le Christ dans la Compagnie de Jésus à 32 ans, toujours en France. Le retour au Liban s'est effectué après mon ordination sacerdotale et après de longues années passées en France. Les missions qui m'ont été confiées tournent autour de l'enseignement supérieur et l'engagement humanitaire auprès des plus pauvres.

Et c'est là que la guerre m'a rattrapé dans un pays qui vit en faillite économique totale depuis 2019 et qui traverse la pire crise socio-politique de son

existence. Et c'est dans cette descente du pays aux enfers que je suis appelé à vivre ma foi et à rendre compte de l'espérance qui m'habite.

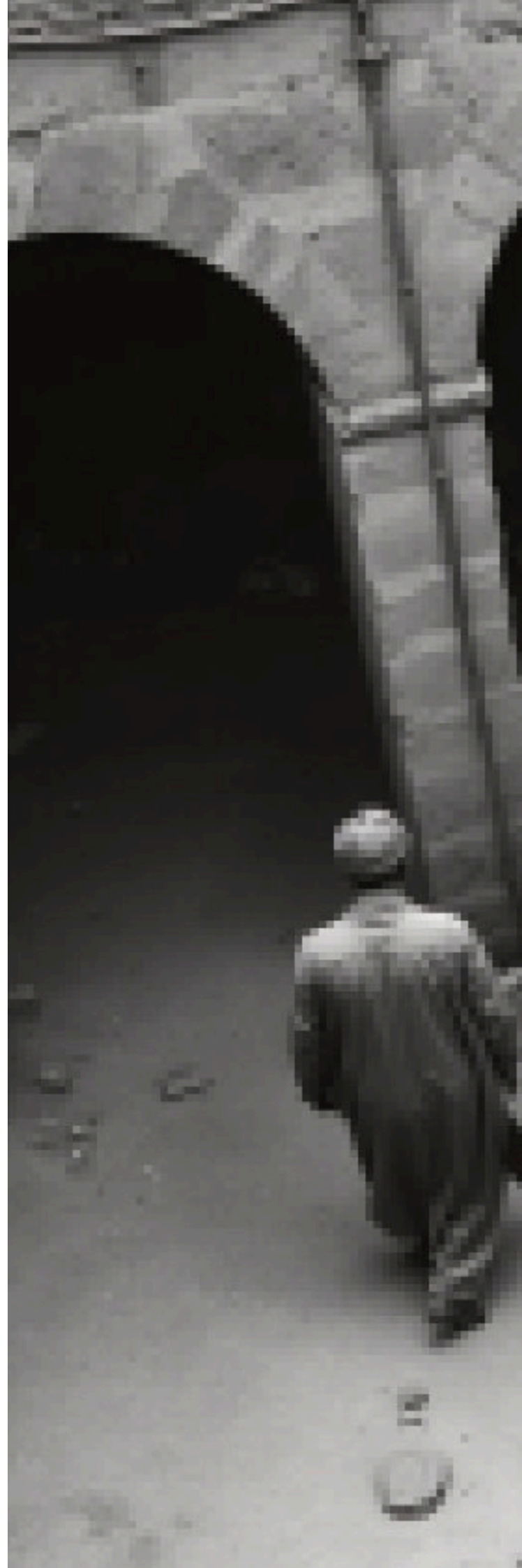
Un des défis à relever se trouve dans ces paroles d'Isaïe 40, 1 « consolez, consolez mon peuple » ; mais avec quelles paroles peut-on consoler toute une population écrasée par les crises à répétitions depuis 2019 ? La consolation prend avant tout la posture d'une oreille qui écoute attentivement la plainte des personnes éprouvées, créant ainsi un espace dialogal et accueillant dans lequel la souffrance est exprimée en toute liberté. Cet espace est le lieu dans lequel se tissent les liens de la fraternité renforçant ainsi les liens qui soudent la communauté ou ce que l'on appelle l'Eglise –

peuple de Dieu. Et c'est dans ce cœur à cœur fraternel que la parole s'échange en toute liberté. Parole de soutien, parole de consolation et parole d'espérance.

Un autre défi à relever se trouve dans le service des uns des autres et de l'engagement des uns envers les autres, notamment l'engagement envers les plus démunis. Il ne s'agit pas de « faire des actes de charité ». Il s'agit de se donner et de donner gratuitement de son temps et parfois de son argent pour être au service des plus démunis. La fraternité prend ici la figure du partage et du don gratuit à l'image de la veuve de l'Évangile de Luc qui donne de son indigence (Luc 21, 1 à 4). Le « plus petit » devient ici le roi à servir et surtout le frère ou la sœur à aimer.

Et c'est là que réside le plus grand des défis : révéler l'amour de Dieu pour les humains face à la violence et à la barbarie. Amour qui trouve sa racine dans l'écoute et qui se manifeste dans l'échange des paroles d'espérance et dans le service des plus démunis. Un amour qui manifeste la puissance de la vie face à la culture de la mort.

Cet amour a un autre nom, celui de résurrection et il possède deux formes bien précises, celle d'un tombeau vide et d'un pain fractionné et partagé.







In times of war: Christmas meditation from Lebanon

JAD CHEBLY SJ

As Christmas and the New Year approach, we find ourselves struggling to make sense of things: how can we believe in a God who became flesh to bring peace when our daily lives are plagued by bombs and explosions? How can we worship Emmanuel when everything around us suggests God has abandoned us? How can we rejoice amidst destruction and death?

These legitimate questions compel us to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas: why did God become flesh? In seeking answers, we turn to those who first welcomed Him—Mary and Joseph, the Shepherds, and the Magi. Their journeys were not just inner transformations but physical undertakings. They left their homes and lives behind to arrive at Bethlehem, where God entered the world.

Joseph and Mary, forced to Bethlehem by a governor's decree, transformed this constraint into an opportunity for life. They went there to welcome Emmanuel. The Shepherds, trapped in the monotony of endless, dark nights, found light in the voices of angels. These voices pierced the silence, breaking their routine and calling them to leave behind a meaningless present to meet the One who transcends time.

The Magi, following an unexpected star, set off on a journey of faith, not knowing where it would lead. At the end of their adventure, they found Him—small and fragile—offering them every adventure imaginable.

Finding God in all things is profoundly challenging in times of war. The suffering of the displaced families in Lebanon reveals the depths of human vulnerability and the stark absence of justice. Yet, paradoxically, it is in this crucible of pain that faith becomes most tangible. In helping displaced families from the South settle in Bikfaya (a town in Mount Lebanon), I witnessed that those who have lost everything often discover that faith is all they truly possess.

Like Mary and Joseph, we endure decisions made by higher authorities and live amid wars and violence we did not choose. Forced from our homes,

we become refugees, stripped even of the comfort of our beds. And yet, it is in this exile that we can truly welcome Emmanuel.

The Jesuit mission invites us to see God not only in consolation but also in desolation. It calls us to walk hand-in-hand with the marginalized, to stand where suffering is greatest, and to reflect God's presence through love in action. Among those who have never known freedom, equality, or peace, our mission is not to provide easy answers but to embody a living testimony of hope and solidarity.

Like the Shepherds, we are called into the darkness of our nights by voices that through the deathly, ghastly silence lead us to Life. Like the Magi, we embark on journeys through uncertainty and doubt, navigating paths paved with insecurity. It is precisely here, in vulnerability and fragility, that He appears to embrace us in our weakness.

By walking alongside the wounded, sharing in their burdens, and working for their dignity, we embody a faith that does justice. In such moments, finding God in all things is no longer a sheerly theological concept—it is a lived experience of discovering His presence even in the midst of chaos and despair.

War is a relentless cycle of darkness, uncertainty, and violence. Yet it is within this turmoil that the love of the One who longs to be with us is revealed. Stripped of all else, we yearn to meet Him, our refuge and shelter.

A PRIEST'S PRAYER FROM A PLACE OF WAR

ANONYMOUS

God, is it wrong for me to say
that I'm not yet so upset or afraid
about the war itself,
that it somehow feels still so far away?

(because life goes on)

(because it has to)

...that instead, I'm more upset
about the little things:
the rising prices
the strikes
the late students

because of new checkpoints
or the fact that
the same students later
don't talk about the war at all

(because life goes on)

(because it has to)

God, what then am I even supposed to do
when I talk about the war more than they do
when I can't think of a single thing in my mission
that can't include
some reference to, some strength or consolation for
a war that my people don't even mention
a war that maybe they don't even want me to mention

(because life goes on)
(because it has to)

God, I don't know how to live these meantimes like they do
how to hold even one "What if" on my shoulder and still serve
while they've been raised to juggle fifty at once
while studying and working and shopping and cooking and
planning, asking:

What if my brother is arrested?
What if our road becomes checkpointed?
What if they close my university?
What if dad never finds a new job?
What if the bombs fall here and not just there?
What if I lose my work because I'm from here and not there?
What if I have nothing left but still have to keep going?

(because life goes on)
(because it has to)

God, so much for « mission », for now I can only listen
and ask questions,
but is it wrong
if so far, the only best one
is « How are you? »
and staying long enough for not one
but two, four or six responses –
« What if's » come to pass or « What if's » rescinded
their trust bringing them out, one by one,

then, and only then, me maybe asking,
with some kind of unspoken hope,
« What's next? »

(because life goes on)

(because it has to)

God, they ask me where you are
but do my answers really matter if they can't find
where you are

in

how they are?

Finding you, cutting doors and windows out of their dead ends?

Finding you, sending « What if's » that promise instead of « What
if's » that portend?

Finding you in the deep, tied roots that hold their towns together?

I suppose

that here – with them, seeking you, O God, in all things –

is where mission begins

because if life goes on

because it has to

You're the one who can bend it

You're the one who will bend it

towards some kind of hope

towards some kind of freedom

towards some kind of peace

all the words I haven't figured out yet

how to credibly speak





Finding God in all things: faith in the time of Slovenian- Yugoslavian war

MARJAN KOKALJ SJ

In Slovenia, between June 27 and July 7, 1991, there was a war between Slovenia and Yugoslavia – Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia with a plebiscite, which was followed by an attack on Slovenia. The war lasted only 10 days and had a minimal number of dead, which was something special.

It is certainly necessary to attribute the merits to the war strategy, the great international information support, especially to the Slovenes scattered around the world, the Catholic Church under Pope John Paul II, with its wide network that stood up for the defence of small nations, but the war could have flared up in a completely different way, had many victims and also lasted. It seemed like a real miracle had happened and we couldn't believe our eyes.

As a Slovene who, only two years ago, was still on compulsory military service in the Yugoslav army and experienced the communist machine firsthand, I was mobilized to fight against Yugoslavia. Since I come from a family that suffered a lot from communism, I certainly had no sympathy for communist Yugoslavia even as a teenager, so it was not difficult to identify with the struggle for independence and democracy, which I also saw as legitimate Christian categories. The first feeling when I put on the military uniform was that we are a small nation, that the Yugoslav army with all its weapons and equipment will quickly destroy us, that they will bomb the cities, etc. On the one hand, this caused me fear, and on the other, a desire for justice or self-defence. When they gave us the weapons, the doctor who was standing there looked at us kind of pityingly, as if he was seeing us for the last time, then they put us on a bus and took us to a certain place. There was tension in the air and anticipation of what would happen, but inside me was fear and thinking about the meaning of life, war, death and eternal life...

One day we were informed that the Yugoslav army was approaching from a neighboring town and that a parachute landing and a battle could follow at night. We "slept" in full combat gear, and I thought what was the point of my studies, which I had started the year before, if I would most likely be dead in a short time. Many things that seemed important to me before have become unimportant and even somewhat banal.

What remained important was my life at this moment, my past, how I lived it and the moral issue of the conflict; I will shoot the opponent or What should I do if someone takes aim at me or directly attacks me at close range? Will I kill and how will I kill if I do? What does this mean for me about evil and life after death? Peace remained a deep desire in the heart.

I spontaneously prayed that if I survived this war, in the future I would live for the fundamental values of life, fight for justice and love, and express my faith courageously. I felt that God was with me, that he was near, whatever was going to happen. I experienced faith in a tangible, close, essential way. As for the moral question of killing, in that particular situation, I decided to shoot at the other person only in defence if I was directly threatened, otherwise bypassing. I was aware that in combat I would automatically act as I had previously decided. A prayer ran through my heart, I asked the Lord that someone from other countries would help us in this defensive war, that someone would know about what was happening to us, and that the outside world would not let us die alone. I thought how horrible it is that people around the

world sit in front of screens, drink coffee and watch with some pleasure what is happening in our country and how people are dying. Anger mingled with sorrow and prayer.

The night passed mostly without sleep, and in the morning we were told that the Yugoslav soldiers had already been stopped by others on the way and that there would be no fight with us. I breathed a sigh of relief, especially in the following days when it became clear that the war was coming to an end. I couldn't believe my ears. God was near, God was tangible, gratitude for this miracle was immeasurable, and an independent country, which in the past (before communism) based its identity precisely on Christianity, became a great gift. I was convinced that the prayers of Christians throughout Slovenia and elsewhere were answered. As the events continued, I felt joy and pride that the Church had done so much for independence that the Vatican, under Pope John Paul II. recognized Slovenia as an independent country and that there were not many victims.

Questions to ponder:

- What or who would you be willing to give your life for?
- In times of trouble, does fear overcome my faith?
- Do I believe in the action of the Holy Spirit and resurrection from the dead?
- What do I do to support those who suffer the most in war conflicts?



Living Faith in Times of War

JOAN MORERA PERICH SJ

Living faith in times of war is a mission underground, where no sun is shining. The seed needs to keep alive the trust that the power of life is inside, the trust to believe that dying every day is a way of nurturing others.

In wars, God seems fully hidden by atrocities and violence. In the book of Isaiah, chapter 50, the suffering servant takes the blows of evildoers while performing a nonviolent internal training of his own senses, educating them to resist without bouncing violence, trusting the Creator of all that exists, learning how to love the enemy.

In Jesus' words, this is a tremendous effort, especially when cruelty and savage crimes trigger explosions of deep rage in us. We are all humans, and looking at innocent populations getting trampled over and over again is a real pressure for the temptation of retaliation. However, the gift of forgiveness is not the only petition to do in prayer.

Prayer is a connection with the love that underlies the profound dimension of all things.

Keeping this cry of a violent reality in our prayers transforms our heart. This tension makes it mature. Then we feel that we must act on what we believe, and we need this rage to be transformed into creative, nonviolent actions—personal actions of commitment for peace, like the ones Jesus proposed: disobeying by excess for, and not against, the oppressor.

Or public, collective actions that are attention-grabbing, engaging many people around dignity and humanity. Indeed, in the midst of brutality, gazing at beauty is a source of breath, a source of God, providing spiritual aid to the desperate.

Nonviolent disobedience is prophetic and requires strategy, a network of people, and creativity to touch people's hearts. Furthermore, it requires faith—faith in the One who addresses the universe in the direction of love; faith to oppose the blind conviction that weapons and military budgets will bring us peace; faith to remember that politics is not always corrupted by the ambition of power, money, territory, and fame, but is especially the aim for the common good; faith that, behind the dark cloud of these stormy wars, there is a warming sun shining for the evil and the good in the world.

Keeping and acting on this faith is actually our mission.



The Olive Tree: Symbol of Life, Faith and Resistance in the Holy Land

JOHN PAUL SJ

Many local Palestinian people have shared with me the important symbolism of the Olive Tree in the Holy Land. Its fruit provides food, oil for cooking, for making soap, and much more. It is a staple as well as a

Yet it also has a spiritual dimension since it is used for sacramental purposes—"Holy Oils"—used for anointing in our sacraments. Significantly, the Olive Tree represents the people. It endures hardships, and droughts; its roots run deep and strong. If the top of the tree is damaged or cut down, the roots continue to send up shoots that become new trees.

The roots are long-lasting—they have survived hundreds upon hundreds of years under harsh conditions and yet they survive—and continue to produce fruit. The trees are part of the land as are the people—they survive and flourish together, despite hardships.



The risky trip and divine providence

TITUS TIN MAUNG SJ

Safety was a great challenge and counting on divine providence is one way to carry out the mission among the oppressed people. Yet, I know now that Jesus would walk the risky road.

Ever since the armed conflict started in Myanmar in 2022, I visited the displaced people and responded to their basic needs. I spent a few days with them. I juggled this with my other occupation in retreat ministry. I did this with companions. Sometimes, inevitably alone.

One evening, while driving home alone from my usual visit, I had an unsettling feeling. Having driven for a few hours, I was tired. The trip home was still long. The Sun was quickly disappearing in the horizon. I would soon be driving in a lonely and dark road. I felt anxious and complained to myself why I had to do it all alone.

At that very moment, another thought ran through my mind, “What do you think Jesus would do if he were here in this given socio-political situation?” This forced me to recall what Jesus did in the gospels. Jesus opted for the poor, defended the weak, fed the hungry, promoted peace and justice and so on. Stream of answers rushed through my mind. As I satiated these answers, it became clear to me that Jesus would do the very things I was doing.

With this conviction, I felt the warmth enveloping my entire being. All the weariness vanished. I knew I was beaming with smile while driving alone in that lonely and dark road. Home was still two-hour drive away; but, I was so consoled that it felt like I arrived home in no time. This experience helped me understand the experiences of the disciples who miraculously reached to their destined shore after being rejoined by Jesus in the boat.

Since then, this question remains deeply lodged in my mind: What would Jesus do if He were in my situation? This has become the source of my en-

ergy and motivation to keep reaching out to those in need.

Another memorable trip was when I travelled to preach a retreat. The travelling to that diocese became increasingly risky and long. What used to take me only 3 hours to drive would now take me one full day. I contacted friends at different sections of the road to inquire about safe passage at different military checkpoints. However, due to the fast change of the situation, I received no guarantee.

That day, a diocesan priest drove me to the venue where 45 priests were gathering for the annual retreat. We had covered a good distance when I got a call from a friend advising me not to proceed to my destination. Nonetheless, making a U-turn was not an option. I couldn't be late to that designated place. So, I said to God, “I am heading to guide a retreat for your beloved priests, protect us throughout the journey, please.”

We kept on driving. Just as we were wondering how to get through the most notorious checkpoint, then came a Buddhist monk who confidently offered to take us through; for he was familiar with those militia at that checkpoint. It was truly providential! We could not thank him enough. He happily acknowledged that he felt obliged to assist us.

However, we had yet to cross a lake where the boatmen had previously been targeted by the military sniper. At the request of this same monk, a boatman anxiously took us across. We eventually made it to our destination that evening. Indeed, where the trip was risky, God's providence was our safety.



Myanmar: Violence is within us, around us, and above us

P. V. JOSEPH BUAN SING SJ

The Jesuits in Myanmar are fewer than those of a centurion's men, and yet despite our weaknesses, we are called and sent to collaborate in this vineyard of the Lord. It has been three years that the nation has been living in hell amid covid and coup, conflict, and war.

Violence is within us, around us, and above us. The faith trial is finding and showing God to people that seek hope and peace during this stark reality of life. Burying the bodies of people killed, consoling the bereaved families, and visiting those whose shelters were arsoned was a Xaverian mission. No words of solace can heal the bottomless wounds.

Often, they asked, "Where is God? Has he abandoned us? Will he not stop this evil?" My theological knowledge has no sufficient responses.

I answer their doubts by administering the sacraments—bringing the crucified Jesus, whose body is broken and blood is shed for us; forgiving and reconciling with God and people; baptising newborn babies, who are a sign of God's love; and marrying the newlywed couples who are God's unceasing blessings to humanity. In addition, the sacrament is present through pastoral visits to the broken, the lonely, and the fearful ones. Occasionally, in their dark moments of life, it is our being present amid them that is all that they need. When the military junta attacks a village or town, the citizens flee to a supposed safer place. As a Jesuit priest, I run with them and live with them in a challenging and uncomfortable place in forests or hills. One learns to suffer with them or die with them (if God wants us, when the bomb drops...).

It is never to be a Jonah, although it is easy for us—as an individual person—without having to be anxious about the loss of properties or others. However, a true shepherd of Christ must be willing to protect and sacrifice his life for the flock. One

day when a new earth and heaven are created in Myanmar, the people will cherish or curse, "our journey with them in their storms of life" or "our selfish escape and hide in our comfort zones during their desert experience of life."

We are not NGOs or INGOs, and hitherto through the charitable works of the Church, the Society of Jesus, and some magnanimous donors, we provide food, shelter, medical care, or emotional support that speaks volumes to those who have lost everything. These actions of Good Samaritans make us witnesses of Christ the Lord, who is Jehovah Jireh, and living in the spirit of koinonia. Often, these resources might not be plentiful, and yet everyone receives some portions to live on. In sharing and distribution of such resources (mentioned above), including everyone regardless of race, language, faith or status fosters the spirit of equality and fratelli tutti.





The Beauty of Faith that Encourages Collaboration Amid War and Conflict

JOSEPH AIK MAUNG SJ

In the context of Myanmar, it is possible that Buddhists, Christians, and Islam belonging to different faiths and cultures can come together to promote justice and peace, which the land and the World are in dire need.

The greatest challenge we often encounter amid war and conflict is ideology that leads toward ultra-nationalism. Ultra-nationalism divides people and brings more violence and conflict to a society that is already tormented by an ongoing situation. In such a situation, minorities, the vulnerable, and the innocent people often become the victims and are subject to abuse and violence.

Under such conditions, people become more divisive, lose trust in one another, and lose hope for the future. Such a divisive culture is not only becoming a threat to humanity but also to the shared values of different faiths and religions. That is genuinely a major challenge being faced by the people of Myanmar.

It is quite timely that the Universal Church encourages collaboration through the movement of Synodality, and (DSS) De Statu Societatis of the Society of Jesus also highly encourages discerned collaboration. Collaboration across diverse faiths and cultures is one of the many ways that foster a just and peaceful society. It is also a possible path

that has proven true in the pastoral, social accompaniment of the people tormented by war, conflict, and natural disasters. Working together to reach out to people affected by man-made and natural disasters through collaboration in the field of education and humanitarian assistance has been so effective and realized to be a beautiful way to promote a faith that does justice and a beautiful way to proclaim the Good News of salvation.

In the context of Myanmar, it is possible that Buddhists, Christians, and Islam belonging to different faiths and cultures can come together to promote justice and peace, which the land and the World are in dire need. The mission of the Society of Jesus in Myanmar has been very much on the path of collaboration amid diversity, especially in accompanying the young and the vulnerable. Such a beautiful collaboration has also proven effective in the recent natural disaster (Cyclone Yagi) that afflicted vulnerable people on top of the war and conflict that they are going through.



Living faith in War: a gift to experience God presence among people

JEROME AYE MIN SJ

Living in war-torn areas is very challenging. It is to live in fear and insecurity. We do not know what is going to happen. In the midst of many uncertainties, I am very grateful for living in the frontier with the suffering people.

I find that living in the Biso IDP camp is a gift to experience God presence among people. God walk by people and live among people. Though hopes seem to be lost in waring zone, it is very touching that people who continue to build hope by keep doing something what they can at the moment. They keep their hope and faith alive making time to pray together in the temporary church building. It is also making me realized that as long as we keep doing something, there is hope.

Being among in the people in displaced enables me to understand their daily struggle for survival and how they have been through. Solidarity is making a real sense, eating what they offer and live how they live.

Celebrating mass for the people in displaced is truly a grace of Christ presence. People are yearning to receive the body and blood of Christ. I realized that the Eucharist is celebration of people in which Christ has been with them in the daily life.

The Eucharistic table is wider than the table itself. Christ dwells among them in the brokenness and displacement. Christ has been celebrating the Eucharist with the people. As Jesus shed his blood for us, I live through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Like St. Paul is saying, "It is no longer I who live, Christ live in me." It is all about give life for other. In this situation of being with people, I realized that my life is a gift that is given by God for the service of others. In the face of the oppressed and injustice, being with the suffering people is an act of saving and living out our faith.

Being sent to frontier mission making me realize that it is not my mission, but it is God's mission (Missio Dei). I am just collaborator. It is encouraged me to be more collaborative. I learn to trust God in the mission and entrust the mission in the hands of God. Being with people through the joy and pain to carry out the mission is beyond the liturgical role.

Encountering the word from "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid (Mk 7: 50) " from the Lord is most consoling moment for me in the given situation of fear. As the Lord showing his love and care through various people, I cannot help but thankful to God to the marvelous deeds. I continue ask for the guidance and strength to fill me with the spirit of magnanimity of the mission. "Without cost you have received, without cost you are to give" (Mt 10:9).

In omnibus Amare et Servire



Close the Sky

P. V. JOSEPH BUAN SING, SJ

In Myanmar, communication itself lives under guard. Telecommunication is under the firm control of the military, switched on or off at will, anywhere, without accountability—like a fragile oil lamp held hostage in unseen hands. Since the genesis of the coup in 1962, and its tragic reincarnation in 2021, every word, every signal, every digital breath has been placed under vigilant scrutiny. Internet speed crawls like a wounded snail along cracked village roads; voices crackle and dissolve into static; long silences interrupt conversations mid-prayer. Social media platforms—Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and others—are banned, their icons disappearing from screens as suddenly as neighbours vanish from bamboo houses at night. Violations have led thousands to prison or death; a few are released only after paying heavy fines, freedom bought with fear and debt.

Within this atmosphere of surveillance and suffocation, the people live without warning. No one knows when the junta will strike. Military convoys emerge from cities like iron serpents, engines growling as they snake through dusty roads toward rural villages nestled among rice fields and hills. They loot what remains, burn homes and places of worship, and kill as they go. Smoke rises above treetops; the smell of ash mixes with the scent of earth and rain. Women and girls are subjected to sexual violence, their cries swallowed by dense jungle and empty fields. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) fall without mercy—onto families sitting cross-legged around evening meals, congregations kneeling in small wooden churches, students hunched over desks in open-air classrooms, farmers bent low in flooded paddies. Bomber aircraft appear suddenly, tearing through the sky like metal thunder, dropping 500-pound bombs or heavier ordnance without warning. Houses collapse into clouds of dust; bodies are shattered beyond recognition. The explosion is deafening—birds scatter, dogs howl, children scream. The sound enters the bones and stays. The trauma remains, echoing long after the jungle grows quiet again. I am still learning to heal from it.

When villages are attacked, people flee instinctively—into forests thick with vines and insects, across rivers swollen with monsoon rain, into open fields scorched by sun or numbed by cold night air. It is an exodus experience, painfully reminiscent of the Israelites in the desert: scarce clean water, hunger, sleepless nights under plastic sheets, and constant fear beneath the open sky. They are torn away from essential places of life—churches where bells once rang at dawn, schools where children recited lessons aloud, hospitals where the sick waited in hope. Children ask when they can return to school; youth ache for their friends; elders struggle to survive in IDP camps where dignity is fragile and memories are heavy. If

only the sky were closed to weapons, life could resume. People could work the fields, pray in peace, play by the rivers, teach and learn beneath shaded roofs, laugh, cry, and grieve freely. Even burying the dead could be done without fear. Now, funerals are celebrated quietly, under trembling skies, every Mass shadowed by the distant hum of aircraft.

Yet even here—especially here—hope breaks through the cracks. When schools close, children walk dusty paths and narrow forest trails to the parish, notebooks tucked under their arms, asking shyly for English or mathematics lessons. Youth gather beneath tin roofs and mango trees for leadership training and faith-oriented programmes. Elders sit quietly in the chapel, candles flickering against wooden walls, fingers moving rhythmically over rosary beads, or kneel in Eucharistic adoration as if anchoring the entire village in prayer. At 5:30 a.m., while mist still clings to the hills and roosters crow in the distance, the church is full. Altar servers—boys and girls—arrive as early as 4:00 a.m., walking through darkness with flashlights and faith. On weekends, children and youth attend catechism or Magis retreats. Through them, I have encountered renewed hope and faith. They teach me theology and philosophy no classroom ever could.

They lead me gently toward God and toward JOY—Jesus, Others, and You (myself)—through simple yet profound acts of love, faith, and hope. Here, the philosophy of Ubuntu—“I am because we are”—and the theology of *koinonia*, deep and shared communion, are not abstract ideas. They are lived realities, embodied in shared rice, shared silence, shared fear, and shared courage. In this way, the community itself becomes a lamp in the darkness, a beacon of light glowing softly amid gunfire and grief.

I often think of Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., who

spent 23 years in Soviet prisons and labour camps, presumed dead by his family and fellow Jesuits, only to return like a phoenix. Amid brutality, killing, and death, I too have found confidence in Emmanuel—God with us. This God does not watch from afar; He walks muddy paths, hides in forests, shelters the displaced, and carries the cross of His suffering people. Myanmar, Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan—we walk with Him through our Good Friday. If Cizek could proclaim With God in Russia and He Leadeth Me, I now sing, from flooded roads and bombed villages, “With God in Myanmar... He never left me alone while living and serving the people... He Leadeth Me.”

One journey remains etched in my memory. After baptizing my nephew, Ignatius, in a nearby town, I had to return to the parish during a flood. Torrential rain blurred the road into a rushing river of mud. Hills disappeared into mist. All alternative bridges had collapsed; only a military-controlled bridge remained. My motorcycle carried parish supplies, its engine struggling against water and fear. I wore my white cassock and sash, soaked and clinging to my body. At the checkpoint, soldiers raised their rifles and aimed. Rain fell on steel barrels. After a tense five-minute conversation, they warned me: mines had been planted everywhere. Survival was uncertain. In that moment of discernment, heart pounding, I chose to return to the parish—like St. Peter turning back toward Rome—trusting that Our Lady of the Way and Her Son were with me. After three days, others who crossed the same path perished instantly.

The daily Ignatian Examen has become my compass. It helps me trace God’s quiet movements through fear, fatigue, people, and unexpected mercy. In conflict zones, needs multiply endlessly—pastoral, educational, social, survival—while labourers and resources remain painfully few. Discernment guides every decision: whether to stay or flee, how to protect lives, how to serve

Catholics and non-Catholics alike, including Buddhists, and how to accompany others while being wounded myself—a wounded healer among the wounded.

In Myanmar, even non-Catholics embody *karuṇā*, Buddhist compassion—not a passing emotion, but a deliberate commitment to relieve suffering. From this flows *mettā* or benevolence, a deep desire that others may live and live well. Violence may bruise spirits and darken hope, yet faith persists like a candle shielded by cupped hands. God’s promises do not fail. We trust that, in His time, God will “close the sky” or “replace the sky,” opening a future where schools echo again with laughter, playgrounds ring with footsteps, homes are rebuilt, shops reopen, and places of worship stand without fear.

Here, the biblical vision of light piercing darkness becomes real:

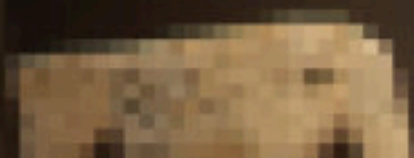
“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?”

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

The people of Myanmar live this psalm daily—beneath jungle canopies, along riverbanks, inside fragile churches, and in displaced camps. In their courage, I recognize the truth of Christ’s promise:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

Through their witness, I have learned that faith is not abstract, hope is not idle, and love is never passive. It is lived, breathed, and shared—amid bombs, floods, jungle nights, and trembling dawns. The people of Myanmar are not merely surviving. They are teaching us how to walk with God, how to love one another, and how to find joy even in the valley of the shadow of death.





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