

LET THEM RISE WITH JESUS

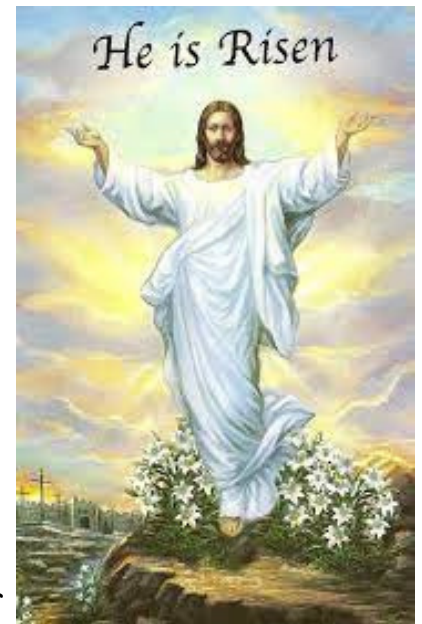
By George Kannanthanam CMF

When Fr Antonio called me to write a reflection for Easter, I was traveling back from Kerala, the Southern State of India to Bangalore, Capital of Karnataka State, seat of the Provincial House of the Bangalore Province. I was returning after handing over a house to a homeless family. They were just two people, a Father and a daughter, who was born blind. Joseph had lost all hope that he could ever give a safe place for her grown up daughter Sheeja, after he would be no more. That was when he heard about Claretian initiative called Project Shelter, giving houses to such families. Same day Joseph called me with great hope. It took about a year for us to complete the house. Jaya and Jose gave us the land. We raised one million rupees (12000 USD) needed for the house as contribution of just 1000 rupees each from 1000 people.

Architect Micheal came out with a beautiful plan. Bishop Jose Pulickal of Kanjirappally Diocese said at the inauguration that it was our responsibility as Church to give safety for people who had lost all hope in life. It was a moment of resurrection for Joseph and Sheeja.

Project Shelter has been giving this Easter experience to one family every month since we launched this movement on housing in October 2023 with a motto to 'home the homeless'. One sixth of the global population does not have a safe and decent place to live. More than 20% of people in most cities are living in the slums. Pope Francis is giving all the push for housing including donation of a million euros for building 20 houses in Rome.

If every religious house and Church Institution took upon themselves the task of building one house every year for the homeless in their neighbourhood, everyone could celebrate Easter in a more dignified manner across the world. In a few years time, no one would have to live in undignified slums and plastic homes.



I was back to Bangalore to receive a group of volunteers from Dallas, Texas, US. They all belonged to Helping Hands Global Foundation. They were all Americans, mostly from Philippines and India. The Foundation undertook a mission every year mostly for medical support to deprived communities in any undeveloped country. Mr Raju from India connected the group to me and I proposed to them to help our people with disabilities who were deprived of proper aids and appliances. I have been working with the physically challenged through the Project Vision since 2013.

Helping Hands team did some miracles with the people who had lost their legs and hands due to accidents or disabilities. Good Sam and Mobility India rendered the technical support to assess about 100 of them and made the moulds to provide them personalised prosthesis that could make them walk again. They did not need the wheel chair anymore. Ten year old Shreya was in cloud nine walking for the first time in her life. Sixty year old Nagappa who had a paralytic stroke got a new lease of life back on his feet. This was resurrection for them. When I read the Gospel for today's Mass (1st of April) I realised that to say "Get up and walk" was not limited to Jesus to say. HE wanted all of us to carry on the mission to give an Easter experience to 'the blind and the dumb and lame' around us. About 10% of people globally live with some disability or the other. Unfortunately even now, not all our Churches are accessible nor our worship, inclusive.

I was woken up at 2 am this morning by the caretakers in Ave Maria block, where the leprosy affected people are provided end of life care in the Sumanahalli Campus, Bangalore, managed by the Claretian Fathers since 1987. Pillappa had a fall. He has broken his leg. Our ambulance rushed to the hospital and he has to be operated today. He will be back on his feet in a few days time. Pillappa was overjoyed when he was taken to his own village of Karahalli, a CMF parish last Sunday. From the time he was identified as leprosy affected, his family had rejected him. Due to the reaction of the villagers, he was confined to a small room. We recovered him from there two years ago. India has 50% of over 200,000 new cases of leprosy globally.



The fifty odd inmates had no home to go or relatives to visit. Sumanahalli has as its mission, to provide them whatever they had lost, not just health, education, training, job and housing including marriages to mainstream them to the community but also acceptance, love and dignity. We strongly believe that every one of the inmates is born with infinite dignity ('Dignitas Infinita') and we try to live it every day by spending our time with them, treating them as our own family members like having food with them every day. Everyone who comes here asks us how people like Pillappa are so happy. Yes, they are filled with daily experience of Easter joy. Our joy was doubled this week, when two daughters of the leprosy affected persons, Shruthi and Ramya who studied in our School completed their studies and became Doctors, one in Ayurveda and other in Pharmacy. No child of the patients today is begging on the road with their parents. Resurrection of a group of people from being rejected and beggars on the street to living with dignity today. I am very happy and proud to be part of this life giving process for 16 years now, sharing life with them.

Fr Madhavath was here with me yesterday after a meeting at our Provincial house. I reminded him that his centre for the treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts named Hope Recovery Centre was completing 25 years. What was started as a social action group at Claretian Seminary in Bangalore in 1988, got established as a treatment centre in Belgaum in North Karnataka by 1999 with just 15 beds. In 25 years it grew to be the largest de-addiction centre with more than 100 beds for the whole State. Alcoholics and drug addicts lose all hope in life. More so are their family members, ruining their life, economy and dignity. Many of them end their life, unable to cope with the emotional strains. Fr Joseph and team ensure that they rise. Rise not just from addiction but from hopelessness. That is why when we started the group we named it as Hope.

I was restless since the earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand on 28th of March. So far more than 3500 deaths are confirmed but more than 10,000 are feared dead. Today spoke to Mr Thomas who was a student with CMF and now a journalist who wrote an article about the earthquake for Global Sisters Report.



He briefed me about the efforts of Sr Josy, Servites Sister who was living in Yango, capital of Myanmar. I spoke to Sister Josy who shared very distressing experiences. Their Church has been brought down by earthquake. Most of the houses of the families near her has been destroyed. Their convent with five Sisters is totally collapsed and they sleep outside with the public. Their whole effort has been to feed the people who have lost everything. A kilo of rice is 8000 Kyat (2 USD). Sister requested for plenty of rice to be bought. No one should go hungry.

Disaster days are Good Fridays for everyone involved. People lose their faith in God and humanity during disasters, especially when no one comes to help them. For most victims, Easter is very far away! A resurrection is possible only with the immediate generous intervention and effort of government, NGOs and the persons of good will from across the world. We acted fast and effectively for the great tsunami of 2004 in Tamil Nadu, India, for earthquake in Nepal in 2014 and the floods in Kerala in 2018. I should have been in Myanmar already, but for the unfortunate military onslaught there despite the earthquake. But plenty of rice will reach them soon. I spoke to Fr Jijo, Provincial of East Asian Delegation who has agreed to send some seed money to the Sisters. ASCLA organisms are also alerted. I spoke to my staff and residence during a special prayer for the victims. They all agreed to contribute. While we are helping Myanmar, General Government is busy helping Argentina and Congo that has seen unprecedented floods. It is very heartening to see the Claretians involved with disasters in whatever way possible, making our mission really 'timely, urgent and effective.'

Jesus spent his lifetime with persons and groups who struggled to survive and then He said... "Follow me". For me it has ONLY one meaning. Follow my work of helping people rise from their hopelessness. Show the desolate person His path of Easter. Let them rise. With Jesus.

Happy Easter.

