

AJANews 82 - July 2009

Holy See: Education for responsibility and fidelity Of hope in verse and prose Spanish portal on our website

Blessed Anuarite Nengapeta is a young Sister of the Holy Family of Kisangani. She worked at Wamba as a teacher. She was murdered resisting the sexual demands of a rebel leader in the Congo in 1964. St Aloysius Gonzaga is a young Jesuit who selflessly gave his life caring for victims of the deadly plague in Rome in 1591. We entrust the African Jesuit AIDS Network to their prayer and protection.

HOLY SEE: EDUCATION FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND FIDELITY

The Church's mission of evangelization includes a strong witness to generous initiatives in favour of those in need. Through schools and centres of specialized formation, through hospitals and charitable institutions, the Church exercises that love of neighbour expressed clearly in the supreme commandment.

I am aware that one of the priorities on the Government's agenda is to provide for greater attention to the health of the population and especially the need to care for the number of people afflicted with HIV/AIDS. In this area the Church will continue to offer its assistance willingly. She is convinced that only a strategy based on education to individual responsibility in the framework of a moral view of human sexuality, especially through conjugal fidelity, can have a real impact on the prevention of this disease. The Church is pleased to cooperate in this task especially in the field of education where new generations of young people are formed as active and responsible members of society.

From the address of Pope Benedict XVI to Mr Melvin Gertze, the new Ambassador of Namibia to the Holy See, 29 May 2009

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090529_ambassador-namibia_en.html

OF HOPE IN VERSE AND PROSE

Thierry Manirambona SJ uses poetry and prose to highlight the life, despair and hope of people with HIV. Here the poet explores the hidden strengths of those who seem small and fragile. Tracing the theme of hope in poetry, he suggests that a true response to the pandemic, even a healing one, is grounded in a daily life filled with compassion, hope, perseverance. Translated into English by Mr Robert Czerny, Ottawa.

With strength of swallows

With strength of swallows
Wings beat with optimism
From ground-shrubs to tree-tops, from tangled thickets to bush-tips
We will break the bonds of death
Toward lands of Hope

We will shed mourning garments
Our cares will evaporate more quickly than the dew
Faster than lightning flash, we will fly into another epoch

With strength of swallows
We will let a new wind hold us aloft
And we will soar in new skies
Towards wholeness

With strength of courage and bravery
No longer mired in daily details
We will gaze up at volcano summits
From which the all new call will thunder

With strength of swallows
Grace will revive our hopes and our greatest desires
And Providence nourish our longing
Clouds may blacken
Rain may drench night and day
Mountains may sink away

With strength of swallows
We will soar in Hope
We will endure the storms
And await in Hope
The birth of a new day

Why use poetry to talk about AIDS?

I wrote this poem in response to the message of the Moderator of JESAM (Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar) on 1 December 2008, World AIDS Day. Here are some bits of that message:

- *Some wonder whether AIDS - of all the urgent challenges facing Africa - still deserves privileged attention.*
- *Why dedicate energy, resources and expertise to what seems one problem among so many?*
- *The issue of HIV/AIDS is getting less importance among students as well as in society.*
- *Some raise the question whether AIDS deserves such attention any more (and a network to focus on it) because it is no longer an emergency.*
- *Even when interest shifts and resources dry up, the Society of Jesus is committed to facing AIDS until it is no more.*

Fratern Masawe SJ, www.jesuitaids.net/pdf/WAD-2008-ENG.pdf

In his message, the Moderator provides a fine response to questions raised by many, for example, the French Bishops' Conference:

This illness constitutes one of the unhappiest facts of our times. It demands courageous efforts of those who are dedicated to fighting it and to caring for the afflicted. Before all else, our thoughts are with those in the grip of AIDS, with those who are close to them

and with all who extend care to them. First of all, we wish to say to the afflicted that their lives still have dignity and value; to those who are HIV-positive, that we understand their secret anguish. We are very conscious of the pain of couples whose mutual trust is affected because one of them is HIV-positive; the pain of nurses and care-givers treating the sick who are their contemporaries. So, so many faces, personal histories, instances of despair; if AIDS is a concern for the whole of society, it challenges Catholics in a particular way. This illness can teach us something about being human. It would be a serious matter if it did not move us to a deeper meaning of existence itself. We must listen to what this pandemic is telling us.

Devant le SIDA, relancer l'espérance - 1995 (Facing AIDS, re-launching hope),
www.portstnicolas.org/Devant-le-SIDA-relancer-l.html

At this time, there are many programmes about AIDS on Burundi television. Young Burundians as well as adults, individually and in groups, understand that the question of AIDS is pertinent and concerns everyone. It is no coincidence that Madame Gapiya (the first Burundian woman to publicly state that she is HIV-positive) is often seen on television speaking out about this scourge.

Among the many questions posed by this illness, there is also the question of Hope, which cannot be answered by looking up its meaning in an encyclopaedia or searching on Google. It is a question whose answers are found in the gaze of a friend dying at less than 20 years of age; in the gaze of a once-vigorous colleague who accepts his collapse like an oak felled by a great wind. The answers come from all sides in our daily life.

Well then, if we have been unable to avoid this affliction, all we have left is to be witnesses of Hope. It is certain that we will never repeat the words of Jesus:

Get up, pick up your mat and go home (Mark 2: 9,11).

We will be unable to adequately dress the wounds of those afflicted but we will be the Keepers of Vigil, the Swallows who tell of spring through our Hope, our efforts, our presence, our compassion in contact with the afflicted.

Why treat of Hope in verse?

First, because poetry is for everyone, as the Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849) said. And then, because Hope has always been one of the great themes of poets. It is never attained fully, once and for all; the poet is constantly struggling to attain it or else to desire it. We can turn to Charles Baudelaire:

*When the world becomes a dank dungeon,
Where Hope, like a bat,
Flutters against walls with damp, timid wings*

We do not read of the agony of Hope in Baudelaire alone; this is found in the majority of poets - Verlaine, Rimbaud, among others. Moreover, for many poets, base goes with ideal, and the light of Hope outshines sorrow. This is what we read in the poet and novelist Andrée Chédid:

*Hope I attached to the roots of life,
against the darkness I assembled bright lights,
set out torches on nights' very edge.*

I too have been inspired by the poetry of Hope, the paschal poetry of Chédid, to free this Swallow. I believe in Life, in Light, in Hope.

As Fr Masawe and the Bishops of France have pointed out, AIDS may raise questions that have no answers. The questions will always remain, yet we are called to be witnesses to Hope, especially in Africa. For in Africa, instead of believing that we are the offspring of

wars, of violence and of all manner of absurdity, we should rather realize that we are the heirs of Hope because we have known Christ. And like Christ, we may raise up those in torment, in all sorts of ways.

The Swallow: this is fragility, it is tenderness, it is the courage to face the clouds. It is Francis Xavier defying tempests on his way to India and China, entrusting himself to Hope alone. The Swallow is you and me every time we defy hopelessness to give a flower to someone in the grip of AIDS.

SPANISH PORTAL ON OUR WEBSITE

The AJAN website now has a Spanish portal jesuitaids.net/esp featuring some articles, poems and news about AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa and the work of AJAN. We are happy to have Spanish on the website, along with English, French, Portuguese and occasionally Swahili.

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