
"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 384

when we are called to "sing up there"

I was very much touched by a report on the world famous singer **Joey Feek**, now diagnosed with terminal cervical cancer. Someone who was once a beautiful and renowned woman is today reduced to a mere shadow of her real self.

In an interview Feek said that she had a very difficult time initially accepting her terminal diagnosis. "More than anything, she felt like she failed at something," Joey revealed. "I thought I did everything, but God decided for me that my job of singing for people down here is my legacy, and he needs me singing up there. That's how I look at it."

Over the past few days, her family has been making final arrangements for Joey as they try and make her as comfortable as possible. She wanted to go to her hometown in Indiana for her final days. She said: "This is where I was born, it's where I was raised, and this is where I die."

Joey seems to be mostly at peace with her situation, and credits her faith with helping her get through this incredibly difficult time. "I pray that one morning I just don't wake up," she says. "But I don't fear anything because I'm so close to God and we've talked about it so many times. I know he's close. And I know he loves me. I'm really at peace. I still believe there's healing in prayer."



During the last five years I have been working as a nurse in our clinic in Rome, mostly in the operation theatre and in the department of oncology. I have seen with my own eyes and touched with my own hands many



persons in such situations. I have realised that, when confronted with news of a terminal illness like cancer, people go through a difficult process. The first reaction is that of shock and disbelief. Tears and moments of silence often follow, both from the sick as well as from the family members. In the second stage some patients enter into a mode of denial, refusing to believe in this terrible truth. In the third stage some may look for magical cures through visits to holy places or persons and trust in the doctors and medicine. In the fourth stage, they often fall into depression and desperation faced with the severity of the illness and its symptoms.

It is at this point that the patient's inner strength and faith in God are truly tested. Some will fight the illness with magnanimity and courage; some can fall into resignation and depression; others will come out heroically, as in the case of Joey Feek, with a firm trust in the love and care of the Almighty. They will no longer have the fear of death nor the pain of leaving loved ones because they will begin to see death and the afterlife as a continuation of their earthly sojourn. In fact, most often they will find a certain serenity and peace. Many will be ready "for singing up there". Some others, of course, will continue to curse their fate.

Let us be clear of one thing. Such a heroic witness of courage and faith can happen only if we prepare ourselves for such moments of paschal mystery on a daily basis, with utmost trust in the One who is our origin and destiny. Whether one is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, healthy or unhealthy...we are all poor and fragile and need divine grace! How terrible it is when one assumes the illusion of omnipotence and arrogance!

In this *Holy Year of Mercy*, the deepest spiritual attitude that we need to have is one of profound humility to entrust ourselves to the infinite mercy of God. As followers of St Vincent, as Christians, if we trust in the infinite love and mercy of God, we will be able to say one day with the same conviction as Joey Feek when she said: "But I don't fear anything because I'm so close to God and we've talked about it so many times. I know he's close. And I know he loves me. I'm really at peace. I still believe there's healing in prayer."

Caring for the sick, especially for terminally ill patients, was my work of evangelisation. In this work, many words do not matter. Often a glance of compassion, a touch of tenderness, a smile radiating from faith and trust in the infinite goodness of God, are some of the means of evangelisation.



Above all people working with patients in such a dire situation should witness to the truth that there is something worth living for even beyond this earthly life – something more beautiful and infinitely lasting.

You wish to believe in that? This is the most profound existential choice that one has to make especially in such critical moments of life.

I, for one, believe in that and will help others to do the same.

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item 385

when the missioned becomes missionary

I am **Fr Ildephonse Bizimungu**, Rwandan, 38 years old, ordained a priest in the Society of the Catholic Apostolate on 7 July 2012.

During the genocide in Rwanda I became a refugee in the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] from 1994-1996. After that I studied nursing. I later worked as a nurse in a pharmacy of the parish until I joined the Pallottines in 2003.



I feel that my vocation can be traced back to the day of my first Holy Communion when I heard a decisive voice in my heart, even as a small boy, urging me to become a priest in the service of God's people. My subsequent association with a Catholic Action Group strengthened that call.

I consider a Pallottine vocation as essentially one of mission.

In becoming a Pallottine priest it was my goal to personally witness the love of God to all people. Such a desire has remained in my heart ever since that first experience. While doing my thesis on St John's Gospel, during my theological studies, my conviction deepened that God's love was to be shared and manifested to all people:

'Eternal life means to know God and Jesus Christ, our only God and continue his mission of manifesting the same love to the whole world'.

I am trying to realise that in my humble ways.



I accepted an appointment to **Malawi** as a missionary because it corresponds to this personal ideal to manifest God's love. In fact I am willing to go anywhere. It can be to Malawi, to a parish – anywhere! To cooperate with God everywhere, fulfilling the mission of Jesus, is the responsibility of all.

St Vincent Pallotti is an exceptional saint in my life because he showed how we must respond to God's will. He proposed the ideal of collaboration among all the people of God. One person alone cannot change the whole world but, by collaborating with one another, we can work effectively for the salvation of all. All must cooperate with the divine grace given. It is not something given only to priests but to all the people of God. Until the time of Pallotti lay people had no opportunity to become engaged in the mission of the church. But it was his noble vision that helped lay people realise their vocation. That was why Vat II acknowledged Pallotti's contribution.

Our *Holy Family* Region became a new Province on 27th December 2015. This provides a moment to review our understanding of mission in the light of the vision of St Vincent. He called us to found our life on the life of Jesus Christ. As we become a new Province we must also grow more mature in order to take up this challenge. A spirit of collaboration must always be our overriding consideration, both in our personal lives and in our community life. And we must also be open to collaboration with other entities. Our collaboration must be aimed at the conversion of ourselves, of our neighbour, and of the whole world.

If Provinces and Regions do not realise such a vision, the Society as a whole will not realise its mission. Renewing ourselves everyday – collaborating with all the people of God – communicating our faith through charity – these are lasting convictions in me as I leave for the new mission in Malawi, founded by the *Heart of Jesus* [German] Province. I myself am a fruit of the work of missionaries. Today it is my time to go as a missionary to another mission land.

Thus the missionary mandate of Jesus is lived through successive generations.

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