

Dear Cursillistas in the Risen Lord,

I am writing this message to you from the Mt Schoenstatt Shrine in Mulgoa, New South Wales, Australia at the end of a Life's Healing Journey for our first year seminarians.

Like many of you, we have been deeply saddened by the news of the many deaths, injury and trauma besetting the Church in Sri Lanka. It seems appropriate that I write to you from this place, as it draws many pilgrims from the Sri Lankan community in Sydney and other places and from many faith traditions, to offer their prayers to our Blessed Mother to guide and intercede with us.

Overnight Marg Morris, the president of APG and myself have been in contact with Fr. Tony Martyn, the Spiritual Advisor and Suzanne De Silva, the President for the Cursillo Movement in Sri Lanka. Our immediate consideration was to let them know that while many miles separate us, we are with them in prayer.

The importance of being in solidarity with other Christians at this time is an important element of our faith. Just as when the first disciples gathered with Mary in the upper room, deeply traumatised by his death and fearing persecution, they encountered the risen Lord for the first time. He came and stood in their midst and said, "Do not be afraid and peace be with you, my own peace I give you."

This is especially important at this time because often at times of great trauma we can lock the door of our hearts to keep great evil at bay. Yet in the midst of the need for spiritual and psychological healing, we discover that Christ stands with us not apart from us. He shares our grief and our sorrow. He also recognises that when we are deeply affronted by great evil our hearts can be infected by the same parasite, weakening ourselves to believe that in the midst of all the goodness of creation, that evil and suffering is all too present to our lives.

The Good News, however, is like Mary, we are called to ponder how in the midst of living through times of great suffering, we can respond in a way which does not pay back like for like, but seeks the forgiveness which only Christ can give. This is not a cheap grace which we can dispense at will. It is a heart-rending cry to be at one with God and one with each other. It calls us to also ensure that in the forgiveness, we remember the pain and anguish people suffer through actions which seek not to minimise the pain. We cannot just wish this away through pious acts or good intentions. When one person suffers, we suffer with them. In that forgiveness, we also recognise that the people who have committed these evil acts need to be held to account and face justice, not of retribution but of atonement for the deep suffering they have caused. In all things, we seek both mercy and justice.

Please join with me in three days of prayer for those who have died, those who have been injured, those families who are deeply traumatised and the heart of the Church and the heart of the nation, in Sri Lanka. This is a loss which cannot just be told in words but only in our heartfelt response which covers the distance between us.

Trust always in the Lord that he is with us even to the end of time.

Go gently in the days ahead.

De Colores,

FR. JOHN ARMSTRONG

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