

An Invaluable lesson from a leper

The gentle sunshine of the early days of May on the land of Tánh Linh-Bình Thuận, the noise of car horns, and the shouting of street vendors, the repetitive and rapid movement of things seem like people are swept in a vortex. I asked myself, "What are people seeking?"

What type of things are people looking for? Meal for the day, a shirt, a grain of rice, or a few dollars to survive? The rich live in big houses, fancy cars, and luxurious things. The poor probably survive with just four walls and a roof. Both reside on the same earth and follow the same timeline. With poor health and living conditions, aging seem to accelerate, allowing death to approach rapidly. We all have an expiration date regardless of skin color, status in life, riches, or poor.

I am preparing to attend the funeral Mass of a leprosy man that I had the opportunity to visit. This is my 2nd and will be the last time seeing him. This is a different type of funeral for the less fortunate and forgotten in society. No drums, flowers, photos, or loved ones are present. When I saw him two months ago, the lasting memory was a middle-aged man; his whole body was full of festering wounds mixed with oozing blood, creating an indescribable fishy smell from time to time. Flies and mosquitoes were landing on his wound, giving me a very uncomfortable feeling. He lives in a house of love; his inheritance is a bed with rough wooden panels put together, surrounded by necessary items; the only food that is available for him year-round is a bowl of dry, stale rice or packets of noodles from your generosity through Hoi Ban Nguoi Cui.

Leprosy caused him to lose his arms, legs, and eyes. But, since I met him, I have never heard a single complaint about life. People often say, "Instead of cursing the darkness of life, let's light a candle to shine for all." His life displays the message! We observed a joyful smile when we visited him even with all the pain and hardship. He complimented us

by saying, "Everyone here is beautiful." We joked back, "You are not telling the truth; you can't see us because you are blind." He replied, "Beauty is in the heart. Not outside appearance, for the body will deteriorate". The conversation with him encourages us to bring that feeling to so many people who need love and sympathy. That was his life with leprosy and loneliness. He passed away with nothing but a basket and a blanket from someone who had given him but not yet used.

A few simple funeral rites, the car carrying the coffin taking him to the grave on a sunny afternoon made my heart sink into nothingness. But, I firmly believe that after his death, a path will be opened to bring the rich and the poor closer together. I am also convinced that this life is only transitional, so the rich and poor can attain peace and calmness. Seeing the people struggling to make a living in the village like him, they are very poor and struggling tremendously, but their hearts are so peaceful. If life is just a struggle, one may give up and question what's the point of it all. However, many will examine the purpose of living. What can one take when leaving this world?

Every day I pray for peace in my life. And, day after day, I ask God to teach me to be aware that He has provided me enough in all circumstance so that I can live on earth in peace.

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