



Archbishop Justin is welcomed by the St Mary Magdalene Parish Community where he preached at their Eucharist.

This morning, I met two IDPs, 'internally displaced persons'. Two young women who had come 400 kilometres from the north.

Like so many, they had suffered extreme violence and killing which has driven them away from their homes.

All of you know these stories, if not that story many others like it.

When we come together and we worship, and we pray, we have sometimes in our minds, where is God? Where is Jesus in these difficulties?

Let me take you to another town, a long time ago, called Bethlehem.

Like so many IDPs there was a woman there who was an IDP who had just given birth to a small child.

We don't know how old the child was when these events happened, perhaps somewhere between a few months and two years.

And, a warlord, a local warlord, militia leader, ruler, sent soldiers to kill the child and the child had gone because God had warned the parents that he needed to be taken away but all other children under two years old in that town were murdered.

The town of course is Bethlehem. The child is Jesus and the mother is Mary.

Where is God? God walks these roads of suffering with us. And that is the pattern for the Church throughout history.

In the reading we had from Corinthians, in the first chapter, Paul says I have been close to despair and in the fourth chapter, which was read to us, Paul says to the Corinthians you are crushed but you're not overwhelmed, you suffer but you're not defeated.

And again, we see that Paul walks with the Corinthians, the hard road of suffering.

But where does that road lead? Where is the destination we are travelling to?

For you here in northern Mozambique, for so many other Christians around the world in places of war and conflict, where it leads is to reconciliation and peace. But it is a road of suffering.

So where is the church, as we travel along this road? Well, let us look in our imaginations and see the road. It is mountainous and rough and sometimes hard to find amidst its twists and turns and the hills.

Across the countryside we see many individuals, some are so exhausted they're sinking to the ground and dying where they sit.

But surprisingly, in the middle, there is a group of people who sing, they are called Christians.

How do they know the road?

They know the road because God has told them the road in His Word and he's told them that he has already walked along the road. And even now, by the Spirit, He walks the road again with the church.

Why do they stay together, when all across the countryside people are walking as individuals lost and struggling. Why do the Christians stay together?

The answer is that Jesus has said that the road to the city of reconciliation, of peace, is a road that is best travelled by the community he has created, his people those who call themselves Christians.

And if they stay together when one falls they are picked up and they regain their strength because they are helped by the others, and at the end of each day they wash each other's feet because they love one another.

It's a dangerous road. Sometimes the church is attacked. The Christians are attacked and not all survive, but they are taken straight to the destination. It is a road where they are fed by the Holy Spirit.

For when they worship and sing, as you were doing so beautifully in this service today; when they pray together, and protest to God, and lament, as well as worship and give thanks – they find new strength. And like all groups, like all families, like all friends sometimes they argue.

We know that that Christians argue with each other and sometimes they go and form another group but that is foolish and not what the Spirit wants us to do.

Because the more we love one another and stay together, the more the Holy Spirit feeds us, strengthens us and enables us to serve one another and protect one another.

And people come from far away and they say to some people in the group; follow my group, the roads only just over there, over the hill. It's a good road. It's better than this group.

But Jesus says in John chapter 17 verse 21, I pray that they, the Christians, will be one, just as you Father and I are one, so that the world may know I came from the Father, and in this road because they walk with Christ.

As they journey they get stronger, not weaker, and other people come and join them and walk with Jesus as well. The road is still hard, but there is hope.

And when they get to their destination, there they find they are welcomed by millions of people, of angels, by Christ himself.

They find that they have learnt to love one another and accept one another and as they walk, they have spread peace across the land.

Let us return finally to today, for this hard rocky road is not imagination. It is the one that you are walking at this time and it is for the church around the world to remember you, to pray for you, to support you as we can.

I came here to Pemba because I do remember you each day in prayer, and I long for the world to support you and to help you. Your journey at this time, in these difficult times is an example to the world, a testimony of the love of God and of your faithfulness.

So, thank you for your faithfulness and as you journey, remember that others know and remember you. We will speak about you not just as an example, but calling for people to support and help.

And the road you walk today, others are walking, and then others will walk a hard road. But, because of you we will walk with greater hope. As so often in the last 100 years, African Christians show the way.

May God love you and keep you ever more deeply, and bless you, and strengthen you in your journey. Amen.

5 min read

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