

THE SPIRIT FOR ALL SEASONS

2005 will soon be over. Perhaps we are relieved to be done with it. It has been a horrendous year. It broke with a deluge of gut-wrenching reports from South Asia on the aftermath of the tsunami - destruction on a hemispheric scale. But then calamity was a safe distance away, until the hurricanes came, tearing across the Gulf Coast, wiping out New Orleans and scores of communities. Even as we are wrestling with the challenge of rehabilitation and reconstruction, a killer quake strikes Pakistan, half way around the world. As winter approaches, the death toll is expected to soar in the remote villages of the Himalayas.

St. Francis of Assisi lived in the 13th century, during the infamous Crusades. Though he gave his wealth away to become a poor mendicant friar, yet he always had more to give. This prayer embodies his spirit:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Then there are the man-made disasters. 15,000 men, women and children are decimated by genocide and famine in Sudan every month. Afghanistan continues to smolder as Taliban leaders are still at large and warlords hold the country hostage. By mid-year, people grew numb to endless reports of suicide bombings in the Middle East, until explosions ripped through the heart of London. A few weeks ago, even as the suburbs of Paris were set ablaze, Melbourne down under had its brush with terrorism. Need we go on? Without a doubt, troubled days are before us.

Our world is torn apart by injustice, hatred and violence. As it bleeds, we ask ourselves: what can we do? Whatever we have to give would just be a drop in an ocean of need. That was how the boy must have felt as he stood contemplating the lunch his mother packed for him. Will five loaves and two small fish feed a multitude of 5,000? That is a logical question, but the wrong one. The key question should be: will I do my share?

We are called to a simple task: to love our neighbors, not to save the whole world. But who are our neighbors? They are simply people in need that you and I can reach. With modern technology and travel, our reach extends far beyond our immediate neighborhood. In the next few pages, you will meet people who did not worry that they had too little to give. They simply gave. In giving, they discovered their neighbors in a different part of the world and made a difference. That is the spirit for all seasons.