



HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS

I was shocked! That was my initial reaction when I first heard about the massacre that took place in Maguindanao. The first reports were still sketchy, but it was clear that this heinous crime went beyond the “normal” pre-election violence in the Philippines. Yesterday, it was reported that a local mayor had been arrested as the main suspect. He belongs to the most powerful family in Maguindanao province (his father is the governor) and the Autonomous Region government of Mindanao (his brother is the governor).

The authorities reported that 57 people were brutally murdered and then buried in a common grave within an hour of their killing, using a backhoe. Included among the victims were 30 reporters and TV media personnel and two women lawyers. They were accompanying the family members of a local gubernatorial candidate (his wife and his sister, who was pregnant) who were on their way to file his candidacy papers. Their six vans were stopped by more than 100 armed men (at what appeared to be a military check point) and they were then taken away to be killed and buried (with their vans). Two other vehicles who just happened to be following their vans on the highway were also stopped and the passengers were all killed.

Last night as I searched for more news details in the internet, I joined the millions of Filipinos who felt outraged by this savagery. How could people be so inhumane that they don't value human life anymore? What could cause human beings to descend into such moral abyss? More than this, it is quite disheartening to hear many people say that they don't believe that the real perpetrators of this despicable deed would ever be brought to justice.

Many Filipinos are asking, “Is there hope for our homeland? Will we ever see the Philippines for which Jose Rizal suffered martyrdom? Will we ever have a nation where freedom, justice, dignity and integrity is the norm and not mere aberrations? Will we ever live up to the kind of Filipinos whom Nonoy Aquino believed to be worth dying for?” I agree that it is easy to lose hope when you look at the history and trends of the Philippine government. Hope deferred often gives way to despair; and despair to surrender.

Poverty in the Philippines is worse than poverty in Malaysia, Thailand, China, Indonesia and Vietnam. One-third of the population still live below the poverty level (13% subsist on \$1.00 per day). Filipino children have higher rates of malnutrition than Vietnamese children, though Vietnam is still significantly poorer than the Philippines. Philippines is one of the countries in the Far East that spends significantly less on their primary school children. About 25% of Filipino children grow up functionally illiterate, with only 59% of the pupils able to finish High School. And to top it off, Philippines still belongs to the Top Ten Most Corrupt Nations (ninth place).

In the last two months, typhoons and floods had ravaged Luzon, leaving hundreds of people dead and thousands homeless. In the

midst of these calamities and horrific conditions in their country, many Filipinos can't help but think that they are being punished by God for their government's ineptness and immorality and the failure of their leaders. They are facing another national election in 2010, where candidates are expected to promise the populace everything they want to hear, but they know deep in their hearts that nothing will really change.

Are nations like the Philippines hopeless? What will transform nations like the Philippines? Some people think that the solution is more money. But will more money just mean more for the wealthy and the privileged? Some say that they need to reform the political system. But reforming the political system does not necessarily mean reformed politicians.

The Good News is that Jesus Christ came to bless all the nations. He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations, to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to all the world. Gospel preaching and disciple-making has the power to bless and transform nations. The Kingdom of God has the power to affect its environment, like the yeast that has the power to expand the dough (**Luke 13:20-21**). The power of God's Kingdom is so potent that any small part of it will have great impact on the people that it touches.

Why have we not seen the transforming power of the Gospel in the countries where it has been preached for so long? What is the problem? Do we need more correct biblical teaching? Better delivery methods? More effective communication? Some have opted for political activism. Others have sought revival in the churches. While these are all important, what I believe is lacking is the right “wineskin” for carrying the Gospel.

How is the Gospel going to be delivered in a way that its transforming power creates lasting impact for good on individuals, society, nations and the world? It will be preached by people who carry the kingdom of God within them, but it becomes visible in their ministry (**Luke 17:20-21**). Within every citizen of the Kingdom is a new spirit that is connected to the Holy Spirit, who communicates the will of the King to him. In this way, the Kingdom of Heaven goes everywhere the citizen goes. And whenever Kingdom citizens gather and minister together, they become an embassy of Heaven on earth.

It is in this world that we manifest our heavenly citizenship through our ministry of loving (**John 13:34-35**). As a loving community, we become the New Wineskin of the Gospel. It is through our ministry of reconciliation (**2 Cor. 5:18-19**) that people learn that Christianity is not meant to be a religion, it is about relationships. And it is through our ministry of transforming influence (**Matt. 5:13-16**) that we will share and teach what every nation needs – **Kingdom values, Kingdom vision, Kingdom wisdom, Kingdom power, and Kingdom resources**.

Jesus Christ is the desire of all nations. The Gospel of His Kingdom – incarnate in His church as a loving community – is the only hope for the hopeless.