

Prayer: Loving and Compassionate God, may the Holy Spirit challenge and guide us. May the spoken and written word lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them, take our hearts and touch them. Help me to speak your word with faithfulness, clarity, wisdom and humility. Amen

Our message is inspired by a documentary film done by Joey Velasco on 2006. A painting of the last supper where Jesus is surrounded by 12 street children in the Philippines instead of apostles with Jesus. I share a short reflection about this during a Bible Study here at St. James and last month during the lunch and learn. Our reflection is called "Kambas ng Lipunan", or Canvass of the Society.

Joey Velasco said, in the beginning I thought painting was a purely manual thing, you just have to stretch a canvas, mix and blend colors. You find yourself trying different things, like portraits, water color, landscapes and other variations. Just in order to have a good art piece, even if at times, I can't find meaning in my art. One time, I tried painting "The Last Supper", but it was a different one, instead of the apostles clad in long clothes, I painted hungry kids covered with dirt, street scavengers, homeless. At first, I was just challenged by the idea, but after sometime I can't look at it directly anymore, they have eyes that stare at me, looking around, observing, speaking to me, asking questions, scrutinizing my soul. I thought they were just art linear figures that I sketched, then I realize this our human beings, they actually have a life, in reality they live in the streets but I failed to look and notice them because they have become so ordinary in my sight. I thought it's nothing for them to be poor, helpless, hungry and homeless because they have been used to it already, No! not really. It is I who am used to their poverty.

By sharing the canvas, the painting, the story, I am not here asking you to go to Philippines to help them, but I am sharing this so we can reflect in our blessed life and really think about what does the teaching of Jesus telling us about compassion. In the first part of the scripture reading, Jesus said this words, **Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.** "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.**

The Canvass of the society are not just a painting; they are children living their lives. It mostly shows how families and children live in poverty, hunger and homelessness, and

while it is difficult to see those children maintaining a positive attitude, I can feel the anguish in their souls

Nene, she lives in a public cemetery with no home, she was abandoned at an early age. For her to live and eat, she works and cleans the grave for living. Joey Velasco said, they dead are even better, they give life to Nene, how about me, when was the last time I give hope and life to others? The 2<sup>nd</sup> child is Joyce, she was just fourteen when she got pregnant, at an early age she is giving up on her childhood as she provides for her child. The 3<sup>rd</sup> child is Tinay, because of poverty she is not able to go to school and did not learn to write, and it's hard to speak. She just stares and looks up in the sky for hope. The 4<sup>th</sup> child is Itok, to survive he works in the streets doing anything and everything in order to earn and buy food, a child living in a dangerous streets instead of going to school. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> child is Onse and Michael, they live and work in the Garbage dump, they work as garbage scavengers, they look for things they can sell in the garbage, things they can eat. IN order to eat, they also wait outside restaurants to pick-up left-over food in the garbage. The 7<sup>th</sup> child is Buknoy, he has sibling he needs to feed, he is 7 years old and he needs to work in the streets so he can buy food for his family, people who lives in poverty is already happy if they have rice and salt. The 8<sup>th</sup> child is Dodoy, they lived under the bridge, homelessness. They do not have a place they can call home, when it is raining, they need to find a different place to sleep. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> child is June and Roselle, their siblings, they Dad works hard driving, but it is not enough to send them to a school and provide healthy food to his children. When Joey asked their parents, in the midst of hopelessness, poverty and hunger, they still believe and trust God, they are poor but they are happy. They pray always so that the children will have a bright future and just be healthy. During that time, some places that people in the streets live is not their own, so they will be forced to move, and their houses demolished. The 11<sup>th</sup> child is emong, he is 8 years old and as child to earn he "Kalakals". What he does is push a cart, go around houses and garbages. He looks for plastic, glasses, cans and papers that you can sell. When Joey showed the painting to Emong, he said this words. While the kids are going around in the streets working, they saw Jesus tired and hungry, so they invited Jesus to eat with them. A child's mine is simple, instead of them being invited by Jesus in the table, it was the kids who invited Jesus to eat. When was the last time we reach out and ask how can we help? When was the last time you focus not on your problem but others. The 12<sup>th</sup> child is Sudan, it is reflection of famine in Africa, it's a reflection that there are a lot of people in the world that lives in hunger and poverty.

The children in the painting represent the millions of children living in a colorless world, for some they are just part of statistics, nobody cares, the grew up in the streets and homeless. It's hard to look them in the eyes, we are not used to it, even Jesus himself can be seen bowing his head in this picture in dismay, Jesus is asking when will people reach out and help them? **Jesus continues to remind us, Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me**

Compassion is the virtue of empathy for the suffering of others. It is regarded as a fundamental part of human love, and a cornerstone of greater social interconnection and humanism. The etymology of "compassion" is Latin, meaning "co-suffering." More virtuous than simple empathy, compassion commonly gives rise to an active desire to alleviate another's suffering. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. Jesus identifies with the people. Their suffering is His suffering, and compassion shown to them is compassion shown to Him. We are called to make a difference in the needs of the people who are suffering.

When I watched this for the first, their experiences caused me to consider how fortunate, unappreciative, and self-centered I am. These young people have very little, but they still share what they do. They worry about whether they will have food tomorrow while I gripe about the things I desire but cannot afford. Because we are so preoccupied with what we lack, we fail to see the blessings we do have and fail to express gratitude. Basic needs include having a decent place to live, clean clothes, fresh, hot meals on the table every single day, access to healthcare, education, and other basics that we take for granted. How much do you value and appreciate your blessings.

I will end the message with some words of Joey Velacso as part of his reflection; I am not a wealthy person. I am just a painter. I cannot be a front liner of any movement. But I know I can make a difference. This is my personal healing and transformative journey through the children's pain, hope, faith, and liberation that can reach across generations and cultures. I am not sharing my strength as an artist or as a writer, but my weakness as a fellow journeyer, who witnessed these children drifting in the dark. Initially, I thought they were lost only to find out in the end that I was the one who was actually lost. It is not a testimony of how I pitied poor children. It is an acknowledgement of God's abounding compassion for me. I am writing this to share how God painted through me and continues to give God's message of hope and unconditional love through my humble life.

Life is a gift from God, you've only got one life, live it well, reach out and find ways to make a difference for others. Amen