



**“Those who do what is true come to the light”
(Jn 3:21)**

Reflections for Lent from the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN)

A hope and determination born out of suffering

Our reflection for the fifth Sunday of Lent (22 March 2015) is written by Jenny Cafiso, director of Canadian Jesuits International (CJI).

I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;

I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

1 Jer 31:31-34

“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?

‘Father, save me from this hour’?

But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour”

Jn 12:20-33

As Jesus faces His impending fate, He says He is “troubled”. Yet despite His fears He feels He can not pull back, that He has to fulfil the purpose of His life.

As I sat with these words, the face of a very fearful young woman I met two years ago in India came to my mind. It was in a rural area in Madhya Pradesh. When we arrived after a few hours drive along a very bumpy road, Sister Jocelynnne, who is also a nurse, told me that during the night she had assisted a woman to give birth to a little girl. She asked me if I wanted to see her.

We entered a clean simple room, very sparsely furnished, with a cement floor, with none of the equipment that you would expect in a birthing room. There in the corner, in semi- darkness, was a cot. In it lay a very young woman with a baby lying beside her, just hours old, wrapped in a cloth. The grandmother sat at the foot of the cot. No one else was there. There was silence. I felt a sense of reverence.

I marvelled at the miracle of this new precious baby and I asked the sister to translate my blessings and good wishes to the mother. The grandmother smiled, the mother was impassive. There was no response.

Later I told Sr Jocelynnne that the mother seemed sad. She told me, she is probably afraid.

When I looked around me, I thought it is no surprise that she should be afraid. I was in one of the poorest states in India, in a rural area where the Jesuits ran a school and a health post, staffed by two sisters. When this young woman went into labour, she had walked to the health post for hours to give birth. Imagine the fear of not knowing if she would make it? What if there were complications? The nearest hospital is three hours away by car.

In a few days, this young woman would walk back to her village, now with a baby. Would she be able to provide for the little girl? Would they have enough food? Would the girl survive the first few years of her life? And if she did, what chances would she have to go to school, to have a better life?

Like many mothers in many parts of the world, this mother had reason to be afraid. Due to the injustices perpetrated against the vast majority of the world's population, children who are born in poverty will face illnesses, such as AIDS, Ebola and malaria and will have little or no access to medical facilities or education. They will face stigma, lack of food, forced displacement because of war. Their most basic human rights will not be respected.

Many share the fear that Jesus faced. But they also share His courage and determination to fulfil the purpose of their lives. When I asked a refugee who had just lost everything why he did not despair, he said it is because they are never alone: they have families to take care of, the hope of a new life to be fulfilled.

I know that the young woman I met, despite her fear, will still walk back to her village and work hard so that her daughter will survive the hunger, illness and exploitation that hang as threats. I know she will do all that is in her power to give her little daughter a better life.

It is a hope and determination born out of suffering. It is here that the vision of a new future grows and gives fruit. It is perhaps part of the covenant that we read about in the first reading, *I will be their God and they shall be my people* – a covenant written upon their heart, to live life and to give life to the fullest.

It is a covenant that we have been all called to make, and which we fulfil only when, despite our fears, we work for a more just world, where poverty and injustice no longer exist.