

# **Archbishop Lori's Homily: Thursday, 1st Week in Lent; CRS Headquarters**

*Thursday, 1st Week in Lent*

*Mass at CRS Headquarters, Baltimore*

*Mar. 14, 2019*

## **Introduction**

This morning, in prayerful solidarity with entire CRS family, we gather at the Lord's table to pray for our co-workers who lost their lives in the tragic plane crash in Ethiopia over the past weekend: Sara, Getnet, Sintayehu, and Mulusew. In this Holy Mass we commend their immortal souls to God while seeking consolation for ourselves and for their families and loved ones in the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. May they enter into the peace and joy of the Kingdom they sought to advance.

Seeking consolation in the Risen Lord always means searching the Scriptures. So, for the next few minutes, let us give our undivided attention to those 'words of spirit and life' which the Savior speaks to us this morning. What does God's Word say of those whose lives were cut short? What does it say to us in our hour of grief and questioning? And how does it light the way forward for us, for our colleagues, and for the family and loved ones of the deceased?

## **The Prayer of Esther**

Surely, the anguished prayer of Queen Esther strikes a chord in our hearts. The daughter of a Jew named Mordecai, Esther was married to the Persian King, Ahasuerus. She knew it was her duty to speak up to the King lest her people perish at the hands of Haman, the King's evil and powerful minister. But Esther was also aware of her humble background, her status as an orphan, and the fact that she was risking her life by pleading to the King for her people.

“Seized with mortal anguish” she poured out her heart to the Lord, she prostrated herself before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “Help me, who am alone and have no help but you...” “Turn our mourning into gladness,” she prayed, “and our sorrows into wholeness.” As we know, Esther’s prayer softened the King’s heart and saved the people of Israel from the extermination that Haman had planned to carry out.

Reading this prayer and trying to make it our own, however, we may be tempted to think that, while we can relate to Esther’s anguished cry for deliverance and wholeness, no prayer we could utter will reverse the course of last weekend’s accident; and no prayer of ours will fully answer the many questions that well up in us in the aftermath such a tragic loss of life.

### **Ask and You Shall Receive**

Similarly, the Lord says to us this morning, “Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” – words which ordinarily lend confidence to our many prayers of petition, especially for the suffering and aspiring peoples CRS serves throughout the world. Yet, as we listen to the Lord’s words today, we may be left wondering. What we’d like to ask for is seemingly impossible, for the door of the earthly lives of our colleagues is forever closed.

In light of the tragedy that overshadows us, we may ask, do these readings raise more questions than they answer? Or do they not instead prompt us to reflect more deeply on the Providence of God whose ways and plans clearly are not our own? In the same Gospel passage, Jesus asks which parent would give his child a stone in place of bread, a snake in place of a fish. Sometimes wittingly and sometimes unwittingly, in our busy, complicated lives, we ask the Lord for what seems eminently good in our limited range of vision, and when things turn out otherwise, as often they do, we may assume that God has handed us a stone or a snake in place of a blessing. Why were such good colleagues taken from us? Why is there so much suffering and grief in this global valley of tears? A tragic moment such as this tests and probes the depth of our faith, the bandwidth of our hope, the mettle of our love. It highlights the kind of faith, hope, and love – coupled with courage – that undergirds the many risks which you and your colleagues take each day to advance the kingdom of justice,

peace, and love upon this earth.

## **What We Know**

There are many things we may never know or fully understand but this we do know: Sara, Getnet, Sintayehu, and Mulusew died while on a mission of mercy. They died in pursuit of their mission to bring a measure of food security to regions of the world that are habitually plagued by famine. They met the Lord as they were dedicating themselves to the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would have them do unto you". They met the Lord as they were attempting to feed him by feeding the hungry, by providing for those who routinely face malnourishment, even starvation. Surely the circumstance of their sudden encounter with the Lord should be a source of comfort and assurance for us and for them.

Ultimately, their work and the work of the entire CRS family is anchored deeply in the saving love of Christ, crucified and risen, that love which we celebrate and share in through the Eucharist - that love which alone is stronger than sin and more powerful than death. In the strength of this greatest of all loves, we commend our colleagues to the Lord as in God's grace we deepen our faith, expand our hope, and strengthen our love so as to continue unabated the global mission of CRS in a needy world. May our colleagues enter into that peace which the Lord has won for us; and may the Lord continue to look with love upon us and upon those we serve. May God bless us and keep us always in his love.