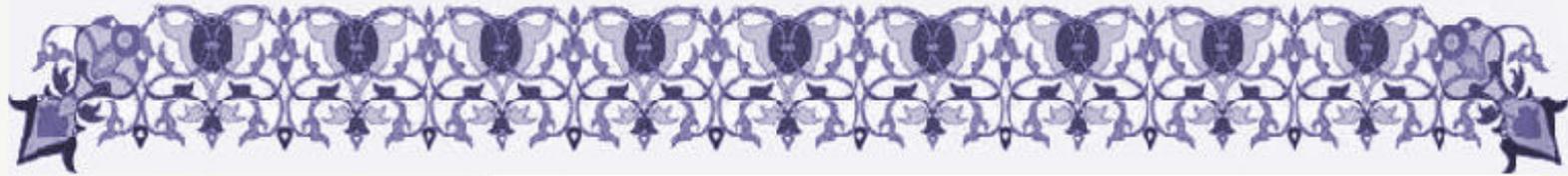


# 2012 Lenten Reflections



With so many witnesses in a great cloud all around us, we too, then, should throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings so closely, and with perseverance keep running in the race which lies ahead of us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and has taken his seat at the right of God's throne.

- Hebrews 12:1-2  
New Jerusalem Bible

Lent reawakens in me the energies made dormant by winter. Usually it coincides closely with the arrival of the first days of spring, a season of lively reemergence of the wonders of the earth in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth with almond blossoms and other wonders of the flora of the Holy Land.

As Lent obliges me to focus inwardly and to make my own account ledger of what is good and what is not so good with my own personal life, it also obliges me to reflect on my surroundings, my environment and the context of my life. Because God's work in history is one of loving initiative and because men and women are all created in His image, Lenten by necessity is a season in which I would want to revisit the love of others and to see in each and every one of the people who inhabit Palestine and Israel my brother and my sister born in the image of God.

To a question of a scribe to Jesus on "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mk12:28) Jesus answers, "The first is 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'. The second is this. 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mk12:29-31)

To love my neighbor is to order my relations with him/her on the basis of justice and dignity. Without these there cannot be a fulfillment of the covenant with God, either of the Old or the New Testaments. For the Hebrews and their exodus from Egypt God revealed himself as God in the liberation of an oppressed people. For this saving act, there must be a commitment to justice on the part of Israelite society. The prophets of the Old Testament have reminded Israel that what God desires most is Justice. (Is 1:23, 3:14-15, Jr 21:12; 22:3, 13; Ho 4:1-2; Am 5:7-17; Mi 6:2-12).

The litany of infractions and infringements on Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is a reminder that Justice is still missing. While Lenten is no time for judgmental statements, yet it is time to remember those who have made a difference in terms of justice and possible reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat come to mind as part of the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1-2) who have made a difference and left an impression.

Much needs to be done on the path of justice for neither peace or reconciliation will become the order of relations between Israelis and Palestinians without justice. While the Palestinian KAIROS document calls for love as a basis to understand the other and to see the image of God in her/his face, it also calls for helping the other to challenge the evil that is in continuing military occupation of Palestinian lands and people. The distinguished group of Palestinian Christians of the "great cloud of witnesses" who have drafted the KAIROS document insist on "keeping on loving one another as brothers and sisters..." (Hebrews 13:1) because we are all the children of God and created in the Divine Image. It is the evil in our hearts that should be challenged not the human persons that we are. This is the basic message of Lent to me.

- Dr. Bernard Sabella, Palestinian Legislative Council Member, Jerusalem, February 17, 2012