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## Encountering God in the Poor

by Katleho Khang SNJM

Recently I have been reflecting on a book, *Jesuit "martyrs": Torches of light and hope*, which presents Jesuits who were deeply rooted in a ministry that promotes faith, justice and reconciliation in an Ignatian way among the poor. It briefly narrates the stories of 57 contemporary Jesuits assassinated in the course of struggling for a reconciled world. Each in their way found a God who suffers daily among us.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us in this. At least a set of questions. What is my experience of the plight of the poor? Could it be to advocate for the poor? Could it be a renewed commitment to eradicating poverty within and outside the church? Who am I invited to accompany? Echoing Pope Francis' words - what does it mean for the church today, in an unequal society, to smell of the sheep?

In South Africa solidarity with the poor could mean providing formation for youth in townships, protecting the rights of refugees and migrants, accompanying women and strengthening their leadership, providing alternatives to racial injustice, challenging unjust frameworks and legal restrictions, providing spiritual and financial resources to end poverty, promoting education, and protecting the environment. To be in solidarity with the poor requires us to change our way of living.

How can we overcome the tragedy of an unequal society full of greed? The poor are losing hope. The call is to understand poverty in all its complexity and make informed and collective decisions. The 57 martyrs show us how to live with the poor *in* hope, noting how they overcome so many crises. We are called to look at reality with new hope, living alongside the poor.

When we connect with the poor, when we let them change us, we will change too.

As Jesuit Father Gregory Boyle, the founder-director of Homeboys Industries California said, "You go to the margins, not to make a difference, because then that's about you. You go to the margins so that the folks at the margins make you different."

We tend to donate, to 'save' lives, to come up with 'solutions'. But maybe it is about accompanying and infusing hope, being willing to stand with the poor.

Service means work or action – much more than just words. We need to discern how to respond to the ills of the world. How can we encounter people more meaningfully? Our ministry is to work and walk alongside the poor. How we hear the voices of those suffering and discern a future filled with hope, should not just be doing but also being: it is about doing our part, not only for the poor but also with the poor.

The new Pastoral Plan for the Church in Southern Africa – with its focus on justice, reconciliation, healing and environment – is a new opportunity for Catholics to connect with the poor beyond abstract ideas and principles. Will our words be translated into action?

How can I, where I live my daily life, accompany those on the margins?

### **GOD'S UNIVERSE, Our Responsibility:**

40 Days of Ecological Reflections

By Fr Anthony Egan SJ

The Jesuit Institute South Africa invites you to the launch of our annual Lent book — "God's Universe, Our Responsibility: 40 Days of Ecological Reflections" by Fr Anthony Egan SJ on 25 February 2020 at 18.00 (for 18.30).

Entrance is free and booking is essential. Light refreshments will be served.

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