

“If you...satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as noonday.” (Isaiah 58:10)

Several months ago, inspired largely by what I had learned from the Dominican student preachers, I became involved in various programs deigned to minister to those who have been trafficked. What truly disgusts me is that society has reached a point that slavery is not only acceptable, but laws and enforcement have been designed to prosecute victims, those who have been enslaved. What I find so reprehensible is that the people forced into slavery are the most vulnerable of all members of society: children, teenagers, the impoverished, those looking for honest work. All of the people who Jesus asked us to protect.

Of the all of programs I work with, the one I treasure most is a group who goes to the French Quarter to minister to those who are trafficked. On our walks, we have seen young children selling chocolate and other items to tourists; young girls selling themselves on the street, young, young teenagers working in massage parlors. On our first walk, we met a young lady who engaged us in conversation. She had so many problems that we could see and even more when we started talking to her. She clearly had a substance abuse problem, had been trafficked, had lost her shoes, all of her belongings were in a bag sitting in a puddle. Yet as we talked to her we realized that her most profound problem was that she had no love. No one to protect her, no one to be her friend, no one to talk to her. She was out on the streets looking for money and other nefarious opportunities to survive, but the only thing she asked our group for was a conversation. She asked if we wanted to hang out for a while. She offered to share with us her few possessions. So we talked to her. We tried to get her to a safe place where she might receive resources to improve her life. In the end, all she would accept was our friendship for the briefest of moments. This is the face I see when I pray for all of

those who are trafficked. The lonely young lady who could be my sister, daughter, or student. Enslaved by drug addiction, desperation and by other human beings that would take advantage of her weakness and desperation for love.

In my meditations after each of our walks, when I close my eyes and try to see the city through eyes of those whom we minister to, I am brought to tears because like in Psalm 55 “I see nothing but violence/ and strife in the city./ Night and day they patrol/ high on the city walls.../It is full of sin./ Its streets are never free of tyranny and deceit” (Psalm 55: 9-11). We’re there to be a prayerful presence, and when the opportunity arises, we offer cards with information about shelters and free health care. We must be cautious as these young women are under constant surveillance. Some are in the shadows, some work in clubs, some panhandle, and some work openly in the street. All of them are slaves. They are slaves to the people who control them and put them on the streets. They are also enslaved by the avarice, appetites, and apathy of those who would buy them. They have lost their pasts, their names, and, for most, their futures.

When Christ meets the women of Jerusalem, he tells them not to “weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children.” And so I do. That is why I step out of my comfort zone and go to them. St. Paul tells us, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2).

Our team may never know if any of the young women we speak to will be saved as a result of our efforts, but we have faith that our prayers will not go unheeded. We step out to give prayer to those who are broken and sometimes unwilling to receive prayer. We step out with rosaries in our pockets and the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We put away fear and put on love, for Paul instructs us “do not neglect to do good and

share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Hebrews 13: 15).