

Readings and prayers for a service about the Street Child World Cup

The Street Child World Cup - a prayer of two halves

First Half:

100,000,000 children have to survive on our worlds streets,
Abused, neglected and unloved.

In Durban 90% have been sexually abused.
HIV/ AIDS and STD's are rampant,
Solvent abuse, stabbings, rape, child trafficking.

*Street life –
Is that the only life they'll know?*

One child having to survive on the streets is a tragedy,
100,000,000 street children becomes a statistic.

Yet each one's name is engraved on Your hands -
Jaun, Siphon, Flavio, Diwata,
Aneta, Micky, An Ly, Fateh.
Each one created in the image of a loving God.
Each one valued beyond price.

God of the favella, the shanty town, and the barrio,
God of the Ghetto, the squatter camp, and the rubbish dump,
The God present where least expected:

We beg that new answers be found to the desperate poverty
that drives so many children onto the streets.
We plead for sanitation, health care and education.
We ask for a new future for these children.
We ask that they may come to know life, in all of its fullness.

God of Surbiton, Morningside and Grantchester,
God of Alsager, Tynemouth and Cardiff Bay,
The God present in our everyday lives:

May we remember that no child should have to sleep on the streets.
May we remember that one street child is one street child too many,
And 100,000,000 is an injustice, made by humans, that we can address.

As we provide care and support for such children,
May we initiate the structural changes needed for long term change.
May we campaign so that the rights to which these children are entitled are realized.
May we recognise their vast untapped potential.
May we recognise how much fuller our lives will be, if this injustice ends.



Second Half:

God of the half volley, the last minute equaliser, and the crunching tackle,
God of the half time talk, the tactics board, and the shortsighted ref,
The God who covers every blade of grass:

May the game that street children around the world love,
Be a game that allows them to be seen as 'people like us - and that we are people like them'
May this game that excites and exasperates us
be used to demonstrate these children's worth and their tremendous potential.

We pray for the Street Child World Cup.

We pray for the organisers and the numerous challenges they face.

We pray for the projects taking part. We pray for the children, whose lives will be transformed by this experience. We pray for the preparation work and follow on support they will need.

We pray for the artists and football coaches preparing for the event.

We pray for the teams of volunteers.

We pray for people of good will to open the right doors.

We pray for administrators providing IDs and visas.

We pray for the television and media coverage, the web traffic and PR machine.

We pray for people with deep pockets to back the project.

We pray for 130 airfares.

We pray for the campaigners who will drive the message forward.

We pray for change in each of the countries taking part.

We pray for changes in allocation and funding within the UK toward street children.

We pray for commitment to a long-term process that will lead to change.

God of the forgotten, the unloved and the abused,

God of the raucous laugh, the cheeky grin, and grimy clothes,

We ask for your blessing on the Street Child World Cup.

Prayer for South African Street Children

Compassionate God

May we be those who listen to the voices of the forgotten generation -

The children on the streets of South Africa and all around the world.

Day by day they face the challenges of abuse, hunger and trauma,

Always asking 'will anyone care for me?'

God of mercy and justice, may we reach out in love, as we remember that each day is a battle - each day is a struggle to survive.

Bless the work of those who walk beside them,

As they seek daily to bring strength, dignity and hope for these forgotten children.

May the children of the streets - walking the road to crucifixion -

Find the way to resurrection -

Because we listen, because we support them. Because we bring your holy and active love.

We ask in the name of Jesus, who said 'let the children come to me'.

from *Making Holy Dreams Come True*, Garth Hewitt

Available from www.amostrust.org/shop

Extract from *Crying in the Wilderness: the Struggle for Justice in South Africa* - Archbishop Desmond Tutu

We have an extraordinary God, this one we worship... Our God is the God who cares, our God is the God who hears, our God is the God who knows and when our God beholds the condition of his children our God comes down to deliver. Our God is God Immanuel. So that when a king throws three young people into a fiery furnace, God doesn't shout good advice from a distance. God comes down and the king sees the people walking unharmed in the fire. Our God is there with us...

God says: my dear children, please help me, please be my partner for I have no hands except your hands, no feet except your feet, no eyes but your eyes to look out into the world. I ask you please tie a towel around your waist and wash the feet of my children. Please help me transform, transfigure this world so that there can be more justice, more caring, more compassion. Please tell them that I love them with a love that does not change. I love them with a love that does not depend on what they do or achieve. I love them, period - and that invests them with a value that is incalculable. I love them, each one of them, as though they were the only person around. I love them because they have become the sanctuary of the Divine Trinity. Tell them this. And tell those who would want to treat them as if they were less than this that what they do is not wrong, not just evil - what they do when they treat a child of God as if they were less than this is a blasphemy, a sacrilege, for it is like spiting in the face of God...

God calls us to serve his world and so serve him who said: 'in as much as you have done this to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it as to me'.

Desmond Tutu 1986

God Only Has Us - Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Dear Child of God, do you realize that God needs you? Do you realize that you are God's partner? When there is someone hungry, God wants to perform the miracle of feeding that person. But it won't any longer be through manna falling from heaven.

Normally, more usually, God can do nothing until we provide God with the means, the bread and the fish, to feed the hungry. When a person is naked, God wants to perform the miracle of clothing that person, but it won't be with a Carducci suit or Calvin Klein outfit floating from heaven. No, it will be because you and I, all of us, have agreed to be God's fellow workers, providing God with the raw material for performing miracles.

There is a church in Rome with a statue of a Christ without arms. When you ask why, you are told that it shows how God relies on us, His human partners, to do His work for Him. Without us, God has no eyes; without us, God has no ears; without us, God has no arms. God waits upon us, and relies on us.

When, according to the Christian faith, we had fallen into the clutches of the devil and were enslaved by sin, God chose Mary, a teenager in a small village, to be the mother of His Son. He sent an archangel to visit her. I envision it happening like this.

Knock knock.

"Come in."

"Er, Mary?"

"Yes."

"Mary, God would like you to be the mother of His Son."

"What? Me!! In this village you can't even scratch yourself without everybody knowing about it! You want me to be an unmarried mother? I'm a decent girl, you know. Sorry, try next door."

If she said that, we would have been up a creek. Mercifully, marvellously, Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word," and the universe breathed a cosmic sigh of relief, because she made it possible for our Saviour to be born.

Mary was a poor teenage girl in Galilee and reminds us that transfiguration of our world comes from even the most unlikely places and people. You are the indispensable agent of change. You should not be daunted by the magnitude of the task before you. Your contribution can inspire others, embolden others who are timid, to stand up for the truth in the midst of a welter of distortion, propaganda, and deceit; stand up for human rights where these are being violated with impunity; stand up for justice, freedom, and love where they are trampled underfoot by injustice, oppression, hatred, and harsh cruelty; stand up for human dignity and decency at times when these are in desperately short supply.

God calls on us to be his partners to work for a new kind of society where people count; where people matter more than things, more than possessions; where human life is not just respected but positively revered; where people will be secure and not suffer from the fear of hunger, from ignorance, from disease; where there will be more gentleness, more caring, more sharing, more compassion, more laughter; where there is peace and not war.

Our partnership with God comes from the fact that we are made in God's image. Each and every human being is created in this same divine image. That is an incredible, a staggering assertion about human beings. It might seem to be an innocuous religious truth, until you say it in a situation of injustice and oppression and exploitation.

In the Christian point of view, our God is one who took our human nature. Our God said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, you have done it unto Me. You don't have to go around looking for God. You don't have to say, "Where is God?" Everyone around you – that is God. It is because God has said this about each one of us, that our faith in God demands the obedience of our whole being in opposing injustice.

For not to oppose injustice is to disobey God.

To oppose injustice and oppression is not something that is merely political. No, it is profoundly religious. Can you imagine what the gospel means to people whose dignity is trodden underfoot every day of their lives, to those who have had their noses rubbed in the dust as if they didn't count? Can you think of anything more subversive of a situation of injustice and oppression? Why should you need Marxist ideology or whatever? The Bible is dynamite in such a situation. In South Africa when they banned books, we told the government the book they should have banned long ago was the Bible, for nothing could be more radical, more revolutionary, as we faced up to the awfulness of injustice, oppression, and racism.

A Holy Moment in Durban - Garth Hewitt

It looked like a Eucharist.....
Of bread and soda drinks
We were in a little lock-up or shed - once perhaps a garage
Here around twelve to fifteen street children huddled -
The smell of urine hit you powerfully when you walked in
This was a Dickensian scene of life at its hardest
The shelter even had a lethal looking power box
With the electricity still working - the children played with the wires -
One had received a shock
Bizarrely there was even a double bed and a headboard.
We heard stories of children thrown out of shelters and homes
Like Bianca who had been in the lock-up for a month -
After being thrown out of a shelter when she had had a baby -
She said 'the white people chased me away' -
They say she cannot support her daughter.
They have even kept her daughter but will not let her visit.
She is seventeen and has been on the streets from 1999.
When she was chased away from the shelter
This group of street children welcomed her and said 'come and stay'.

But then the street team brought sodas, fruit juice and bread
And the children queued to receive -
One of the elder street children distributed -
He happened to be wearing a cross
It looked like a Eucharist
And in the deepest sense I knew it was
Children deserted by the world
Let down by those they should trust
Given a holy meal and this was the real presence of God
Seen in Umthombo's Durban Street Team
As they counselled and organised hospital visits for those who were sick
And listened to their stories and needs
It was a holy moment in such a broken place.

from *Holy Dreams to Feed the Soul*, Garth Hewitt
Available from www.amostrust.org/shop

Now I am only fighting with my pen - Garth Hewitt

O God thank you that Thabisile is back at school
May this be the start of a new life for her
Thabisile Shandu came on the Streets in 2002 –
She was thirteen. Her mother died in that year – an AIDs related death.
She went to stay with her older brother
But as she put it – 'he slept with me so I decided to run'.
On the street she was often on glue – 'It stopped me feeling cold and hunger'
On being asked how she survived on the street
She said – 'The street taught me how to fight'

She survived by petty stealing – but now she is back at school life has changed
She says 'now I am only fighting with my pen'
Thabisile lived with many other street children under a tree in an area called Parkview
Umthombo's Durban Street Team have given her the opportunity to go back to school –
They have supported her to make it possible
She says 'I am happy now – even proud of myself'
She wants to be a social worker – 'I would like to help other Street Kids
So they don't have to sleep on the roads like us.
I would like them to have a better life than me'.
At school her favourite subject is English – she is very articulate and can write well.
O God thank you that Thabisile is back at school – Thank you for her talents
Bless her and give her the strength to continue
So she can realise her ambitions and be a blessing to others.

from *Holy Dreams to Feed the Soul*, Garth Hewitt
Available from www.amostrust.org/shop