

Message of Archbishop Charles Bo at inter-religious prayer service for Nargis Anniversary

On 2 May 2009, at 9:00 A.M (local time) inter-religious prayers service was held to mark the first anniversary of Cyclone Nargis in St. Peter's Cathedral, Patheingyi, Myanmar, with the leaders of different religions (Buddhist, Muslim, Hindus, etc...) and the local authorities. Archbishop Charles Bo (Yangon Arch diocese) and Bp John Hsane Hgyi (Patheingyi Diocese) were also present for the occasion. Archbishop Charles Bo delivered following message.



Archbishop Charles Bo visited the Nargis Victim in May, 2009

This is a significant moment. Today we are united in tears and we are united in hope. This is the most moving moment, because we, the living gathered here, are indebted to those who died. Last year on this same day, 150,000 of our country men and women, and children perished. We are painfully aware that they are not just numbers, they are fathers, mothers, husbands, wives and children to many those who survive. A pestering wound gnaws the heart of our brothers and sisters in the delta. Death ruled supreme for a day. Yet humanity asserted rapidly that day. Their death unleashed in every human heart a

stream of compassion. Compassion became a common religion that day. After a year of that mutilating tragedy, we are gathered here today affirming our common humanity – a humanity that could be moved by the human tear, a humanity that rushed to help a wounded brother and sister, proclaiming the overwhelming power of Compassion.

We all come from various backgrounds – Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and other faiths. The cyclone did not discriminate. It attacked us all. As darkness danced its gory death, the light of faith lit a small lamp in our heart – the lamp of compassion. One of the noble truths of Buddhism is Compassion – Karuna. Lord Buddha constantly urged his disciples that Karuna – the encompassing love should become the common thread of all human activity. Metta (Mercy) and Karuna (Compassion) are the lamp posts of Buddhism. Islam gives 98 attributes to God. The foremost among them is 'the God who is merciful and Compassionate'. The whole of Koran the word 'compassion' appears hundreds of times, affirming the great attribute God shares with human beings. Christianity calls God as the father of Compassion. Jesus gave a very moving Sermon on the mount. His Beatitudes speak of noble qualities of human beings: foremost among them being the compassion. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, where the unknown victim was helped by the Samaritan man, who counted no cost, looked for no religion but reached out to a man in need remains the most inspiring story for the Christian works of charity all over the world. God, according to Christianity, is the Father of Compassion.

On that sad night last year, provoked by the colossal tragedy and inspired by our religious beliefs, we, the people of Myanmar, rose as a one family on the first week of Cyclone Nargis. Every one, the poor and the rich, even from the far off Myitkyina, rushed with whatever they had. Compassion broke even the walls of Jails. Some 50 Myanmar men locked inside the Thai Prisons rushed in with a gift of 120 US dollars – all that they managed to collect. Down the Phyapon river, the Buddhist monks were swimming across the violent waves to save Christian women while the Christian groups were reaching out to the Buddhist villages with emergency supplies. The Muslim brethren in Yangon, organized one of the biggest emergency food

supplies. The Hindu temples organized community meals. We were one, we were one family.

Even before the international humanitarian groups could reach these areas, our youth reached out to the remote villages, carrying first aid, food and rendering psycho Social support. All this was done through life threatening situations, traveling through the dangerous rivers, wading through the bodies of human and animals.

We proved to the world that day that in times of sorrow, we are a one nation, one people and we have only one religion, the religion of the heart – that is compassion. The whole international community affirms the great role played by the locals in saving lives, rescuing people. Compassion united this nation breaking all the walls that hitherto divided us. Ironically we all felt strong in those moments when we rushed in with to our brothers and sisters.

What we all did fades into oblivion when we hear the stories of compassion. We shared our clothes, our rice and our material things with our brothers. But there were some on that fateful night made the supreme sacrifice of their life that nite. Jesus said, there is no greater love than the act of giving one's life for the sake of his friends. On that night hundreds gave their lives so that others can live. There are many stories. Let me recount one or two.

Beyond Laputta in a village, as the water waves were rising, a man was scrambling up the Coconut tree with his wife and children on one side and his own mother on the other side. After sometime, holding on to all became an ordeal to the man and he had to make a painful decision when his mother told him " I am responsible for you, since I gave you life. But you are responsible for your wife and two children. Let me go and save them'. The man with great reluctance let his mother go. This is the height of compassion, the supreme sacrifice. In another place, an elder sister carried his little brother and sister and pushed them to the shore and she herself fell into the river, never to come back. Profiles of courage, written in tears, shows to us the great power of compassion enshrined in the human heart.



A Buddhist Monk, A Catholic Priest and a Catholic Nun together in a relief work camp, May, 2009.

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Today we come together to affirm this common humanity, the common virtue of compassion. We mourn for their death but we also vouchsafe that their death would not go waste. Wherever a human being suffers, we will remember those who died last year. We need not erect great memorials to our dead brothers and sisters. We will remember that our acts of kindness to those who suffer is the fitting memorials to them. Nature can strip naked human weakness and kill hundreds. But the message from Myanmar is vivid and strong: we shall overcome. We shall overcome not because we are powerful or rich, but because we have protected a little lamp named compassion in every heart that shines through the darkness. Let Compassion penetrate the marrow of our bones, as the Buddhist seer Nagarjuna prays, so that every human suffering may bring us closer together, affirming our common humanity.

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Messages of Archbishop Charles Bo on Nargis: <http://mymrc.blogspot.com/>

Nargis relief works of Church: <http://mymrc.blogspot.com>