

## **World AIDS Day Homily December 2011.**

We, on World AIDS Day “make present” through Remembrance those affected and infected by the Human Immune Virus.

Remembrance has deep roots in the theology of the Hebrew people: Zikaron (Hebrew) “making present again” is at the heart of the Passover celebration recalling the great event of Exodus when the Israelites were delivered by God, from bondage in Egypt. Zikaron is at the heart of the Eucharist, Christ’s Passion, death and resurrection.

The passion of Christ is not just an event 2000 years ago in history: it is present today. It continues down through history to our own day.

We await in Advent Christ’s coming in glory, but Christ is already present among us and calls us to recognise him..

Christ is present among us, suffering, rejected and often mocked; comes to us weakened. He comes to us as one, sick and in need, a stranger: as one who suffers!

I am struck by the simple fact that the Risen Christ has the wounds of his passion in his body. His body bear the wounds that identify him as the Suffering One, par excellence!

Jesus invites Thomas to be involved: touch me: my hands, my feet, my side..

The society in which the early Church first proclaimed the Gospel, regarded the Cross and Crucifixion, as symbols of shame, stigma and rejection. They were words not to be mentioned by decent people.

Yet St Paul says: “with Christ I hang on the cross,” “with Christ I am nailed to the cross,” with Christ I carry the wounds in my own body” and to the Corinthians he says; “here we are proclaiming a crucified Christ, foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews”.

However, Christ calls us, his disciples, to “take up the cross and follow me”.

Simon of Cyrene is the example of true discipleship.

Take up the cross, not in Morbidity but in Solidarity. In responding like Simon of Cyrene we become – “Siblings of the Crucified Christ”, involved in suffering, stigma, shame and rejection, and solidarity!

As a Passionist, I have been in ministry, to, with, and for, people who have the Human Immune Virus since the early 1990s, when times were very grim regarding the pandemic.

I have had time to journey with them and reflect with them, on the issues. I find myself now understanding that, “the Name of Jesus is written on the forehead of people who are HIV+”. They bear the wounds of suffering, of stigma and often rejection.

In Positive Catholics, I have seen them to be Simon of Cyrene to one another, and to others. I have seen, by their sickness (their Cross) they, like Christ have broken down in their bodies the walls of divisions; the division between

male and female, black and white, well-off and poor, citizen and stranger, Gay and Heterosexual.

I have seen them perform this task better than many of the healthy among us!!

Yet they still have to struggle against prejudice and exclusion.

Most people can say they have been diagnosed as having, cancer, or leukaemia, heart disease, etc etc. you name it they can say it! The response is usually sympathetic: by society, family, friends, work mates, and Church, Synagogue, Mosque, temple or even "Club" etc.

However, anyone HIV+ is not enabled, not empowered, to say, "I am HIV+". Why, because of reactions! Reactions that are negative, rejecting, judgmental, and fearful!

It is difficult therefore to be open, to forge new friendships, or keep old ones; begin new relationships etc because they are fraught with difficulties and problems...

People with the Human Immune Virus, are not the problem, or "The Problem", they are a Question!!

A question about our prejudices: those superficial and those deep.

It is a question of whether we recognise and welcome Christ in his "Siblings" who have the Human Immune Virus... or whether we don't!

That is the Question!..

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