Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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I found this Michael J. Sanem quote for the feast of Christ the King in the November issue of Give Us This Day:

> … We can gild images of Jesus in gold, we can proclaim his Kingship from the pulpit. But until we see the face of our King in the least of our sisters and brothers — until we recognize the crucified Christ in the broken, abused, and suffering people in our family, our Church, and our world — we remain a long way from his Kingdom.

Sanam is a parish minister in Kansas City, Missouri, and occasionally writes commentaries for the monthly magazine Give Us This Day. I think the quote is particularly important today because of the unrest that we find in our own city streets and in the world. It seems to me that it will become difficult to solve the problems which we face here and even in our own church until we can see the Christ who is among us on the cross.

The Gospel to which Sanem was referring is from Luke 23: 35-43. The part that jumped out at me was when Jesus talked to the criminal hanging on the cross beside him, who said to him: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

What is our focus? What do we want to achieve in this life? The criminal, at least, had figured out that it wasn't what he had done with his life that was important. Rather, he still had the opportunity to ask Jesus for what he needed and what he wanted in the next life. That "next life" thing for which he should have been working is paradise — where our world should be going and on which it should be focused. But the world has lost its focus.

We need to bring ourselves back into that focus: achieving paradise.

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I was recently talking with someone about the state of our world, country and church. I commented that we are very good about praying specifically for people who are victims — victims of other people’s harshness, unkindness, cruelty, bad judgment and downright meanness. "What would happen if we started praying for

the perpetrator?" I asked. "What if we purposely picked the 'bad person' to pray for — especially if we know who that bad person is?"

For example, if we lived back in the 1940s and we knew that Adolf Hitler was persecuting the Jews, could we pray for him specifically and for a conversion of his conscience and mind? I was surprised at the answer. "No, I cannot do that," my companion said. "I cannot pray for someone who I know has no conscience."

Honestly, I did not know what to say. I thought my suggestion that praying for a change of heart and mind would be a good thing. However, they did not agree. How then will change ever come? How will goodness ever happen again?

I do believe that we must recognize suffering wherever it occurs. I also believe that we should do whatever we can to stop that suffering. I think we need to help each other to see cruelty in whomever it exists. That is focusing on paradise.

If we stopped focusing on ourselves, perhaps we could see the Christ in one another. I believe that sometimes we have become too "me" centered" — better known as navel gazing. While it is important to take care of ourselves and our loved ones, we also know that the Gospel that Jesus preached was much more outgoing and engaging. We will take ourselves and a number of others with us to paradise.

Jesus did not expect us to light our candles and put them under a bushel basket, but to be a light for all who wish to enjoy the radiance of its glow. Is everyone going to agree with us? No, but we might cause them to think differently, and maybe cause gradual changes. I don't believe today the same way I did 50 years ago, because I have grown and changed in my thinking.

The focus that will bring us to paradise together is love. We must continue always to forgive, believe, hope, and pray that our endurance will bring forth love. Love always wins. Hate never will! "Forgiving, believing, hoping, enduring, in all these things love never ends" (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

The greatest example we have of this is Jesus Christ crucified. He allowed that to happen to prove to us that in the end love will win and hate will lose. The result of our loving relationship with all that we encounter will be paradise for us and for others, because they will pass it on. We don’t need a lot — kindness doesn't cost me too much money — mostly it means going out of myself to see someone else who doesn't look like me or act like me.

Perhaps I need to work at the food kitchen or in the homeless shelter. I could go to the local grade school and volunteer to read to students or tutor them. Let's get together with people who don't think as we do and discuss our nation's needs. Consider joining a JustFaith group — a national Catholic group that offers faith formation and community building.

Even if the whole world has lost its focus, the optimist in me says that working together with love, we can right the ship. See you in paradise! Pass it on!