

**November 11, 2012 – 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time**  
***Prepared by Barbara Fraser, former lay missioner, Peru***

[First Kings 17:10-16](#); [Psalms 146:7, 8-9, 9-10](#); [Hebrews 9:24-28](#); [Mark 12:38-44](#) or [12:41-44](#)

One rainy Saturday morning high in the mountains of northern Peru, a group of men and women crowded into the tiny chapel for a meeting. A mining company wanted to open a huge copper mine uphill – and upstream – from the farms where they grew fruit trees and coffee beans.

Outside, the rain poured off the tin roofs of the wooden houses dripped from the umbrella-like leaves of papaya trees and ran down the muddy street where a donkey dozed. Compared to Lima, Peru's sprawling capital, or most other major cities in the hemisphere, this was a very poor village. But the people who lived there saw it differently.

"The mining company says that it will help us out of poverty," one man said. "But we don't consider ourselves poor. We have our homes. We have our fields, where we grow crops to feed our families. We have a coffee cooperative that is doing well. We would like to have better health care and education for our children, and we would like to have safe drinking water. But we are not poor."

Today's readings call us to consider – as that farmer did, on that rainy morning – what is really essential to our lives.

At first glance, the Psalm appears to describe how God works in the world – raising up those who are bowed down, protecting those who are most vulnerable, fighting for justice, feeding the hungry and tending the sick. But it is actually a guide for all of us on the journey to the fullness of life. Those are the things we must do if we call ourselves followers of Jesus. Another Old Testament writer put it even more succinctly: What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?

When the Christian life is reduced to those essentials, we realize how many of the things that once seemed so necessary – a bigger house, a new-model car, a cell phone with more options, a lighter laptop computer, softer toilet paper, another pair of shoes – may not be so vital after all.

Throughout Latin America and other parts of the world, farmers like those in northern Peru are protesting mines that foul their water and disrupt their community life and economy. Some accept the mines, and that is their right. But others ask why there is such a hunger for natural resources that their communities must suffer the consequences without receiving the benefits.

In southern Mexico, near the border with Guatemala, there is a town where the northbound freight train stops to re-couple cars. Every day, three or four people from the local parish take food, water and some basic medicine to the railroad yard and offer it to migrants who are traveling north from Honduras, Guatemala or El Salvador in hopes of a better life across the border in the United States.

Traveling by train is dangerous, but the migrants say the risk is worth taking if they can earn enough money for their own – or their children's – education. Because they have to be ready to jump on and off the train at a moment's notice, and may have to go long distances on

foot, the migrants travel light. For a journey that may take days or weeks, they carry only what will fit in a daypack or a gym bag. They take with them only what is truly essential.

As the year draws to a close, this is a good time to ask ourselves: What am I carrying in my gym bag? What is truly essential in my life? It's easy to say that God is essential; it is harder to do the things the Psalmist describes. But if God lights our way, that is where the journey must lead.

Our families and friends are probably also on the list of essentials, as is good health. But what about "things"? Of the many items in our homes and our lives, what is crucial and what is clutter? How carefully did I think before I bought those things? How much energy was used to make them? Can they biodegrade or will they take up space in a landfill ... or drift around the ocean as garbage ... for years to come? Am I taking only what is truly essential from the Earth God created for us and using it in a thoughtful, responsible way? Do I give something back to the Earth in exchange for what I take from it?

So much of modern life is wasteful – Styrofoam packaging, food that goes uneaten and is thrown out, the steady stream of new models that quickly render the old ones obsolete. Is that the lifestyle God calls us to imitate? Or are we called to dwell with greater care in God's Creation? To make our choices thoughtfully and deliberately?

The first reading is clear: God's covenant leads to fullness of life, but if we follow emptiness, we will become empty.

The Gospel calls us to reconsider the meaning of wealth and poverty, power and weakness, faith and faithfulness. Just after the passage in which Jesus warns of the hypocrisy of those who pray openly, but then "devour the houses of widows," he watches as people deposit money in the treasury. And he singles out the widow, who gives the little she has saved. In the end, we will be judged not by what we have, but by how we use what we have, by whether we have been good stewards of God's Creation, whether we have made sure that justice is done for those who are oppressed, whether we have learned to tell the difference between our wants and our needs.

As 2012 draws to a close and we prepare for the birth of the Lord and the start of a New Year, let us pray for the Spirit to light our way, to enlighten us, to open our hearts to what is truly essential.

**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, social justice and integrity of creation**

200 New York Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

202-832-1780 [ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org) [www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)