

Over the past four weeks I traveled to eight different cities in Australia to give lectures about Catholic liturgy. Australian Catholics believe strongly in God, but they are concerned that few people come to mass on Sunday. The number is even smaller there than here. Some dioceses there cover vast areas of territory, and they have few priests to serve. Priests from other countries have moved in to help. Leaders of various dioceses know each other well, and they have forged good friendships. They help one another carry their cross.

My hosts were saddened at the race riots that took place in Ferguson Missouri this month. Australians have had their own history of violence, especially against Aborigines. But today they seem to blend different races and cultures better than we do, possibly because of the great variety of people who live there from all over the world.

On my last day in Australia I was giving a talk about funerals to a group of priests, deacons and seminarians in the city of Perth, way over on the west coast. During a break I received an unexpected phone call from my cousin, Sr. Cathy Bertrand. She told me that her mother, my Aunt Harriet, had just died. So right after I got home I went to St. Paul, Minnesota, for the funeral. Harriet and her husband Frank had three children. Both daughters became members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Sr. Mary works in Guatemala, and both of them share a friend that all of us have, a friend who now lives in St. Paul: Bro. Jim Krause. He also came to my aunt's funeral to offer prayers and support.

During this mass today we are sharing a happier occasion of **baptisms / a wedding**. We rejoice with families who are experiencing the grace of God in their lives. Yet at the same time we are painfully aware of the tragedies unfolding beyond Ferguson into Iraq, Gaza, and the Ukraine. All of us experience sad moments in addition to happy ones.

We believe in a benevolent God. We bring our concerns to God because we believe he is the source of all good. Yet sometimes our trials continue. In today's gospel, Jesus predicts that tragedy will personally come to him. Peter tries to stop him from even thinking about it, and Jesus says something quite surprising: Peter is thinking as humans do, not as God does. Peter thought, as we often do, that God wishes to preserve us from all adversity, but Jesus says that every one of us will have to carry a cross.

We do not carry that cross alone. Just as Simon of Cyrene helped carry the cross of Jesus, so Jesus helps carry ours. Individually we experience sorrows at home, and together we share the concerns of nations far away. We believe that in some mysterious way every cross is part of God's plan. We come to glory not by avoiding the cross, but in accepting it.