

Peace Talk Series by Mary Gloria C. Njoku

In this edition of the programme, peace, I present to you another story of Mr. Innocent.

Remember Innocent from my previous series. Innocent was the man who suffered to get red cross aid for his people during the war but his uncle connived and took over the coordination of the red cross aid from him and accused him of an offence Innocent did not commit. Innocent was later proven Innocent of the accusation.

I had the privilege of meeting Mr Innocent again and again. I discovered that Mr. Innocent has not changed his attitude and the promotion of peaceful resolutions to issues involving him and others. During the month of July, Innocent's nephew, Onyema, who was assisting him in his home poisoned him. Indeed the story was told that Onyema's real target was Mr. Innocent and his wife. Unfortunately, Innocent's wife, Amarachi, did not feel like eating that faithful night so she went to bed without eating the poisoned food with her husband.

In the middle of the night, Innocent started having problems. Amarachi, his wife tried to help to ease his pain but his pain worsened with every minute. Luckily for Innocent, Amarachi thought of giving him oil. When Innocent had consumed the palm oil he began to purge until he released the poison in his system. The next morning, Amarachi called her children and told them about the ordeal and how they discovered that Onyema their nephew gave Innocent the poison.

The children were very infuriated because of this occurrence and they demanded that Onyema be sent back to his parents at once. One of the daughters, Ugonma called her friend and shared the experience with her friend who advised that Onyema should be arrested. Ugonma, who seemed to understand her father's way of life discussed the implication of arresting Onyema. She felt that the arrest may bring conflict in the family and so she advised her father to send Onyema back without wasting time. Innocent listened to Ugonma but asked that Onyema be given two weeks before being sent home. Innocent and his daughter, Ugonma dialogued about the best possible way to send him home without disruption of family peace. Eventually, they agreed to send him home as soon as he completes his term examinations which was in two days time. So Innocent sent Onyema home on the Saturday following his examinations. Innocent did not tell Onyema's parents what he did. When Innocent returned home and told his wife and children that he did not inform his parents about his poisoning behaviour, Innocent's children were infuriated and wondered why their father did not spill the bean. Innocent quietly explained to them that he would inform Onyema's parents later when things have calmed down. Throughout this experience, I was informed that Innocent remained calm about the whole situation. When some of his children wanted to take up the case, he advised them to let things be. He was thankful that his life has been spared. I learned though that Innocent is now afraid of eating the food through which he was poisoned. The last time I saw him, he said that he is unable to eat the food no matter how well prepared it is.

My dear listener, if you were Innocent will you react like him. If you were his wife would you support Innocent in his decision to approach the situation calmly. If you were his child, would you be alright with his decision or would you involve the police anyway. I would really like to get your feedback about the way Innocent managed his poisoning episode.

I am sure that you might be saying that this story is only told and treated like this because Innocent survived the poison. The ending might be different if he had died because of the poison. Here is my understanding about the family of Innocent. The man, Innocent has been so used to finding peaceful resolutions of challenges that come his way that his wife and children have

learned to ask themselves what their father would do in any given situation. Therefore, most times, after the initial feeling of we must do something remarkable, Innocent's children will follow the option they feel that their father would prefer. Therefore my prediction is that if Innocent had died, his children would not let people know that he died from poison.

I learned in the course of my discussion with innocent's family that Innocent has had many near death experiences including previous poisoning attempts, hired assassins and road accidents. And in all cases, Innocent avoided generating family conflicts. As I looked at Innocent in his old age, I cannot help feeling that the secret to his ability to stay healthy, energetic and youthful is his peaceful disposition.

Innocent's story reminds me of a family that visited me last month to inform me that they have discovered the person who poisoned their son and that they are going to ensure that the clan's decision to excommunicate them from the village is carried out and that they want the culprit and his family to suffer. The question I asked them was, will all these efforts bring back their son who has died? The answered no. Then I asked them why they are spending so much energy to make sure that their own blood brother dies along with their son. At the end of the day, I asked them to reflect on what they want to achieve, the peace their son attempted to bring in their family and how they would want to remember the legacy of their son. I wish this family can find new ways to manage their challenges. I wish they can grant pardon to the culprit and wish him true conversion. I know in my heart that granting pardon to someone who has offended us and wishing them true conversion and graces sometimes brings new life into the person who offended us. On our part, we feel free and sometimes remember that we have joined Jesus in saying "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing." I believe that this attitude can bring happiness and peace to us. We are then capacitated to allow God to take complete control of our lives, to fight for us if need be and to shield us from all unwanted calamities in accordance with his will.

I pray and hope that we will have the courage to endure hurts that people met out to us for the sake of the kingdom of God. I pray that people who are already peacemakers will touch our lives so that we can learn to live peace. I remember our Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his example of peace and Mother Theresa of Calcutta who created and sustained peace through social responsibility - caring for the less privileged. I pray that the spirit of these icons of peace may inspire us to join the peace movement. Let us make ours each day the prayer of St. Francis

1. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love.

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord

And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.

Where there is darkness, only light.

And where there's sadness, ever joy.

O Master, grant that I may never seek,
so much to be consoled, as to console,
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.

3. Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we 're born to eternal life.

Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226

So let us continue to pray and say Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.