

DEFORMED BODIES STILL LONG FOR LIVE

Our Kon Thup parish in Gia Lai province, a mountainous region, a parish of ethnic minorities, is located in the middle of a leprosy village. People here have a very low level of education because their life is very difficult, above all they have a great inferiority complex and often have to keep far from others because they are lepers. Everyone is afraid of them and avoids them, dare not to approach them.

Their lives are always sticky with pains. Suffering of their bodies is leprosy disease ravages their bodies by "Mycobacterium Leprae" bacterium. They are so poor that they do not have food or medicine to treat them, so they need kind, generous and sharing hearts to help them overcome difficulties in daily life. Because of the disease, they have to accept to separate and live quietly. As soon as they are cured, they want to integrate into community but they still have inferiority complex about themselves. Therefore, our church is the only place they could go to. There is an invisible chain at church bringing them closer together, giving them a greater sense of safety and love.

The day I came to Kon Thup parish, all welcomed me including lepers who are lack of limbs but their faces showed a strong vitality, their hearts longed for being loved and smiles were always on their lips. These images attached closely in my mind and heart. I always hope to do something useful for them and give them a little warmth of humanity. But I can't do anything on my own, so I need helping hands. I would like to thank "Friends of Lepers in Vietnam" for helping suffering situations in Kon Thup parish during the past time.

They are people who are still alive, but in the eyes of many people, they no longer exist. They become a burden to society. They don't want to involve with leprosy disease but it came to them. Just like we have experienced during Covid pandemic, each of us wants to not be infected but the virus never spares anyone. It is fate of unlucky people, and we are more fortunate people.

None of us can live for them or can walk on path of their life but we can help them to walk with a warm heart. A heart finds a heart. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said when she cared for the poor and homeless in India: "*Their life is not as a human life so when they die we try to help them to die as human being*". The words of the Saint make us think: she is a small person with a big heart.

They always sing a song of thanksgiving. Thanks for many people who still remember them. Thanks for giving them chances to connect with compassionate hearts and for healing their wounds. Thanks for loving them generously without any debt and giving hearts to warm unfortunate lives, that is "FRIENDS OF LEPERS IN VIETNAM".

Kon Thup, Kontum Diocese July 29, 2022
Fr. Peter Nguyen Dinh Phung, SVD