

FEBRUARY 10, 2025 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

A story is told of a woman who was standing on a curb waiting for the light to change so that she could cross that street. Directly across from her, on the opposite curb, was a girl of about 16 years who, too, was waiting to cross the street. The woman couldn't help but notice that the girl was crying. In fact, her grief was so great that she made no effort to hide it. For a moment, their eyes met. It was only a passing glance, but it was enough for the woman to see the terrible pain that filled the girl's eyes. Then the girl looked away. At that very moment, the light changed and each stepped off the curb into the street and started across. And just as they were about to meet, the woman's motherly instincts came rushing to the surface. Every part of her wanted to reach out and comfort this girl. This desire was all the more great because that girl was about the same age as one of her own daughters. But the woman passed by. She did never even greet the girl.

Hours later, the pain-filled eyes of that girl continued to haunt this woman. Over and over, the woman said to herself, "Why didn't I turn, fall in step with her, and say, 'Honey, can I help you?' But I did not, I walked by." "Sure, she may have rejected me and thought me of as a nosy person. But so what? Only a few seconds would have been lost but those few seconds would have been enough to let that girl know that someone cared. But instead, I walked by. I acted as if she did not exist."

Sisters and brothers, our gospel today speaks of how, unlike that woman in the story, Jesus reached out to those who were in need. Need of healing, need of comfort, need of care. And the gospel also indicates to us that tremendous hunger of the people to be cured and made whole by Jesus. Jesus had just taught a huge crowd and he had just fed 5,000 people. And he had just spent long hours in prayer. And so he would

have been tired and exhausted. Yet, when there was a need, he was there, available to people.

In our world at large, and in our more local communities, there is so much hunger. Not just for food and drink, but also for belonging, for acceptance, for affirmation, for meaning, for healing, and so on. And those who are hungry are crying out to us as people cried out to Jesus. And we are to respond to them and to do whatever we can to alleviate the hungers of our world. Unfortunately, in our world today, it is not always easy to be a good Samaritan. There was an incident of a police officer who stopped to help a driver who had ended up in a ditch, and the police officer was shot. There was an incident of a neighbour who intervened to stop a domestic conflict and was stabbed. There was an incident of a student who tried to stop one of his classmates from being bullied, and he was violently attacked. These incidents are rare, but when we see them or when we hear of them, the natural tendency for us is to say to ourselves, like that woman in the story, "Why should I be bothered?" Or, "Why should I take this unnecessary risk?"

Today's gospel reminds us, that is not the approach or the appropriate response as disciples of Jesus. The appropriate response is to do what we can, even if it means taking a reasonable risk. And so, sisters and brothers, as we gather together on this memorial of Saint Scholastica, and we pray as we come together, that she and her twin brother, Saint Benedict, may inspire us all and help us all to respond to the needs of the people of our time, as they did in their own time. Amen.