

Hope from the Margins: Authentic Accompaniment and Encounter with Christ

By Dan Jason

Hope often emerges in abundant form within the margins—those spaces where life’s messiness and fragility are evident. Jesus, born into the margins of a manger, brings light to a dark and chaotic world. I have learned that living as a follower of Christ is to see His face in people, especially those who are often unloved. The disenfranchised are labeled inexcusably as “them” —the beautiful creation that has shown me the hidden face of Jesus time after time. By showing up and sharing with our brothers and sisters the light of God’s kingdom shines. Through authentic accompaniment and genuine encounter, we are pilgrims of hope walking with hearts that reflect the radical love of the Gospel.

Table of Encounter

As Catholics, the epicenter of our faith is the Eucharist—the Lord’s table, where we meet Jesus Christ in a profound act of thanksgiving. It’s here we are reminded of the invitation to extend God’s unbound love to humanity. The Eucharist goes beyond sacred ritual, as Christ unites us with Himself and His people. We are propelled in a powerful way to go out and *be Church*. In the Blessed Sacrament, being fed by His body and blood we are transformed into a communal family sharing a journey where no sheep is left behind. The essence of Jesus’ perfect love is His presence, veiled behind elements of bread and wine. He is revealed as He reveals Himself in the poor, disabled, elderly, incarcerated, and lonely. Christ feeds us spiritually and physically—freely and abundantly. The encounter with Jesus occurs through meeting Him in the face of those we meet, especially the marginalized. It’s our Lord’s great commission to walk with, listen to, and share in the struggles and joys of others.

Going Behind Bars & Dumpster Diving with Jesus

The margins take many forms: physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. In these spaces, hope is not a vague concept, but a living reality. It’s where Jesus meets and invites us into accompaniment. During my time at Greene Correctional and Cocksackie Max Prison, I encountered real hope that arises even amidst arguably one of the darkest places on the planet. Reading the living word and celebrating the Eucharist with incarcerated men showed me the face of Christ. The inmates, often deemed irredeemable by society, gathered with us at our Lord’s table, offering up their brokenness. Their gratitude was palpable and their voices strong as they prayed for those who would never pray for them.

Then, I sifted through a mountain of trash in the Mexico City dump, realizing Christ’s power to erase margins in the poorest of the poor. There was no “us” and “them.” At that moment it was just us. Jesus was there, alive in the humble collection of cardboard and cans, reminding me that hope transcends any wall, smell, appearance, or language barrier. Olga, a thirty year old woman smiled at me with radiant joy saying, “I’m happy because I have my children, faith in God, and you showed up.” In that instance I had a flashback of an encounter some fifteen years prior in the slums of Kariobangi, Kenya where an elderly woman in her dilapidated shack

offered me life changing hospitality. Sitting in her sole wooden chair and eating a small bowl of lentils, I felt the Spirit engulf the room as she prayed over her seven orphaned grandchildren who lost their parents from HIV/AIDs. In these moments, Jesus shows up and we witness a form of extreme hope. Her heart of gold was offered to me just like the woman at the well, whose thirst was quenched from living water... “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Over the years, these raw encounters with Christ have taught me that within the darkness and mess of the margins this is where love can often be found in its purest form. It wasn't about what I could give, but what I received—a glimpse of God's kingdom breaking through the cracks of poverty and despair. Many joys we share elicit holy moments, reminders that the Lord's love extends to every nook and cranny if we are simply willing to show up.

Rescued Beyond Boundaries

For many, the diocese and parish lived in is their spiritual home, as it should be a safe haven for the soul. At Brooke Orphanage in India, the children have come to know the redemption of Jesus after being rescued from slavery and abuse. As they laugh, dance, play and pray it's a living testimony of the resurrected life and how a parish family can bring healing. These kids, once stripped of their humanity, now live with true hope. Their joy comes from knowing they are kings and queens as beloved children of God. It's up to us to help the forgotten carry their cross.

Taking the Field with Faith

The sun beamed down on me, as the crowd roared when the kids took the diamond on Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, New York—the origin of baseball. Playing America's pastime with a community of young people with Down Syndrome & Autism reminded me of the sweetness and beauty of God as their laughter filled the air. It was a sacred moment etched in time, a foreshadowing of what is to come for those who believe and arrive at the pearly white gates some day. Unlike the world that judges harshly based on appearance, ability, status, notoriety, and financial prowess—the kids gave freely of themselves without abandon. Just as our Lord gave His only Son to us in perfect love, our faith and hearts are what matters most.

Erasing the Margin

Hope sees the light even within the darkness. It recognizes those in the margin, going beyond barriers to show up in their lives. To erase the margins, we must stand with our brothers and sisters in their situation and embrace them. It's done through walking with those we encounter with gratitude and humility. Whether inside steeley prison walls, rummaging through smelly garbage heaps, running onto ball fields, or within our home towns, we are called to encounter Jesus in the people we meet. My prayer is that we extend the invitation of the Lord's table, sharing in the hope of God's kingdom. It's in these encounters, in walking together, that we truly

are Church. It's here that we become the Body of Christ—the living hope, *saints*, who give and receive our Lord in the world.

As we look toward Jesus—the way maker, may we receive His unending invitation and extend ourselves to the margins. Let us remember that the smile of God is the gateway to the soul. So go out, filled with Eucharistic joy, and share in making Christ's hope known through small acts of great love!