



Fr. Stan Swamy: Called and Sent to Be the Voice of the Voiceless

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Abstract: This article is the revised version of the homily for the memorial mass of Fr Stan Swamy held on July 11, 2021, at De Nobili college chapel, Pune. The Readings of the mass are Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16 Good shepherd and John 1: 19 – 23 Voice in the wilderness.

Keywords: Fr Stan Swamy, Voice for Voiceless, Vocation as Call.

“Who are you?” “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,” said John the Baptist. Fr Stan Lourdhusamy was the VOICE crying out among the tribals of India in particular Chotanagpur. “Make straight the way of the Lord” cried John the Baptist. Save the water, forest and the land of the tribals. Let justice, equality and fraternity prevail among the tribals and the marginalized voiced Stan.

Interpreting the word of God

I have chosen the theme and the readings for this Mass in loving memory of Fr Stan for I have heard his voice raised among the tribals and among the Jesuits challenging us courageously and inviting us gently. I have experienced him as a caring,

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compassionate, just and true shepherd and pastor. Yes, he went in search of his sheep – the Adivasis. He committed himself to rescue them on the days of clouds and darkness – yes, Stan raised his voice against all forms of injustice and exploitations done to our tribal brothers and sisters in solidarity with them. Like the good shepherd, Stan organized and conscientized the tribals and brought them back into their own land – *zameen* and fed them by the water course – *jaal*. Yes, he remained with them till the end to claim and reclaim the good and rich pasture - beautiful fields, mountains and rivers – jungle. Like God, our good shepherd Stan lived with the tribals strengthening the weak and challenging the strong. With the God of Israel the just one, Stan kept feeding the tribals with justice and continued freeing the unjustly oppressed and imprisoned.

Fr Stan's Voice as I Have Heard It

1. Since I am a member of Jamshedpur Jesuit province I have heard Stan's voice many a time. As a novice and as a scholastic I had seen him rarely and heard him only on province days. I had read his books and I had heard about him. I was told that as he was committed to the cause of the tribals he rarely made his home visits!! On one of the province days, I gathered the courage to ask him about this. He acknowledged that what I heard was true. For many years he had not been to TN. He said "One day my sister rang me up and told, brother you had not been to the home for years!! I know you are busy with your mission. But this year my daughter is getting married. You must come. You must make an exception because I am a widow". Stan told me that he made it a point to go. Yes, the companion and disciple of Jesus had compassion for the widows and the poor.
2. During my regency, I met him and shared with him my interest to serve the poor. In view of that, I may do my studies on Rural development. There he explained to me the two levels of serving the tribals and the poor. i. What I was thinking, namely helping them financially and materially. That is charity and developmental. ii. Empowering them by bringing about structural renewal and change i.e. creating a just society doing justice which involves more risks and challenges. You choose he said.

3. As a regent, I was in a high school community, whereas Stan preferred to live amidst the people in Chaibasa town. When I asked him as to why he was not living with us in our community he said: “Tony my presence and the type of mission I am involved in may disturb the day-today running of the school, therefore, I prefer to live with the people”. Yes, I felt moved by his solidarity with people and his sensitivity for the varied ministries of Society.
4. We used to have our province days in XLRI because of the infrastructure available. In one of our meetings, Stan got up and asked pointing out to the podium whether we do away with the nameplate that was fixed on it “XLRI”. Not that he was against the institutions, but he wanted the institutions to serve the tribals and the poor. Thanks to his challenge that in consultation with Fr Provincial the managing director of TATA steel plant reached out to the tribal welfare.
5. After my tertianship in Sitagarah, Hazaribag, as I was returning to the province I met Stan in Bagaicha the social action centre, Naamkum, Ranchi. In the course our conversation he told me with a deep sigh “well two of our brothers have returned to the Lord this year”. In 2007 two of his Jesuit companions passed away. I was touched by his faith and companionship.

Conclusion

The body of Fr Stan our companion on mission is put to death but his spirit is very much alive among us. His VOICE cannot be silenced among the tribals and the poor. In his own words “Even the gaged bird sings”!

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