2. Reflection

Hearing the voice of God in voices of the poor.

> *"My metaphor for thinking about the world is 'the beloved of God'. It means that I must tie my life to the voice of God in my heart as I hear it through the poor, the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and those voices other than the voice of the institutions. For that I may be rejected by the system, of course, but I cannot keep my soul and do otherwise."*
>
> Joan Chittister OSB *Called to Question: A spiritual memoir.*

In this beautiful and challenging picture, Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, well-known author and international speaker, talks not only of hearing the voices of the poor, the oppressed, and the most vulnerable, but of attaching the very meaning of her life to what she hears through those voices. This pursuit of Sister Joan is a tough challenge for all of us.

But there is a second idea raised in the passage above, about the need for us to take care that we hear the *right* voice. This second challenge is a tall order in today's media saturated world where we are inundated with news and information, and the opinions of this person and that. When we hear of a new development plan or mining development which affects a poor community, more often than not we get the positive stories crafted by clever Public Relations staff wrapped in language of 'progress' and 'benefits'. The voices of communities affected are too far away, and become drowned out by the voice of those more powerful.

All the more reason for us to heed the words of Sister Joan. If we want to uphold the dignity of people, regardless of their financial wealth and power, the first thing we are called to do is to *listen* to them...not to institutions which purport to speak on their behalf.

The citizens who are risking much by speaking out on the streets of the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and more - what are they asking for, what do they have to say, and what does 'justice' look like to them.



In response to what we hear, we have the opportunity to ask questions of ourselves - what kinds of laws/policies (national and international) do we have? Do they espouse human freedom, or put people in bondage? Are there opportunities for ordinary people like us to change some of these laws or make new ones? What role can we play?

(Listening and responding to the grassroots struggles in our region is the essence of Jubilee Australia's mission. Learn more in part 4 of the Jubilee Sunday 2013 material.)