

Homily at the Memorial Eucharist for Fr. Stan Swamy SJ

Curia Generalizia-Rome 10th July 2021, 16.30 hrs

Readings: 2 Tim: 4/1-8; Jn. 12/20-26

Dear brothers and sisters,

“I am not a silent spectator, I am part of the game, and I am ready to pay the price”. That was the last message Stan gave 2 days before his arrest on 8th October 2020.

Both St. Paul in the first reading as well as St. John in the gospel urge us how to proclaim the message of Jesus in and through our lives and be persevering at all times, favourable or unfavourable. Paul, in the first reading of today, explains the reality of his time to Timothy. This is the situation even today in many parts of the world. People prefer not to listen to sound doctrines and facts, but they search for myths and stories. They tell lies, spread fake news and attempt to enslave every institution and structure to suit their interest. They have ears itching to listen to only praises and accolades, wanting only things that will satisfy their hunger for power, name, and fame and will close their eyes from seeing the reality and ears from listening to the cry of the poor and the marginalized.

In such an evil situation what must one do and what did Stan do over the 5 decades? Paul tells Timothy to be sober, simple, to endure suffering, to preach not with words but with life and doing what Jesus would do always. St. John in the gospel tells that we need to be like seeds. If we want to bear fruit, we need to die.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe speaking to the Jesuit alumni in Spain in 1973 said, “Evil is overcome only by good, hate by love, egoism by generosity. It is thus that we must sow justice in our world. To be just, it is not enough to refrain from injustice. One must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society.”

Fr. Arrupe invites us to cultivate 4 things in order to bring justice with love. I wish to connect these 4 points with the life of Fr. Stan Swamy.

One – **Live more simply**. Stan always lived simply and humbly among the poor. He never accumulated things for himself. Even when he was taken from Bagaicha on 8th October to Taloja jail, he took only a small bag with basic things and said, “I am ready to go”.

Second – **Don’t compromise to gain comforts and profit**. Stan would never compromise on values. He would not hesitate to speak truth to power, raise uncomfortable questions and challenge their commitment. He did this also to many of our Jesuits, not only to those in institutions but also those in the social ministry. He would call a spade a spade. He never hesitated to question anyone, who compromised with the values of Christ - his role model - for the sake of some petty benefits that the institutions received. Stan totally followed the words of Arrupe, who said, “our basic point of reference must be the truly poor, the truly marginalized, in our own countries and in the Third World”. Stan saw with his own eyes the sufferings and exploitation of adivasis and he never compromised with anything that would go against their interests.

Third – **change unjust structures**. This is the most difficult and this is where Stan was very firm and committed but always with deep love for the integral development of all. The focus of his life-mission was to change the unjust structures that took away the resources of the adivasis, *jal*, *jungle* and *jameen*, (water, forest and land). He was an intellectual, like

the first Jesuits, who as Fr. General Arturo Sosa said during his visit to Canada, were both educated and poor. Fr. General said, "What a blessing it would be if the Society of Jesus could honestly say that its 'learned Jesuits' had been taught by the poor." Stan was one such Jesuit who researched, read, reflected and articulated his thoughts through articles and books. He questioned the state or anyone who abused structures and acted unjustly. He would always say, the adivasis have taught me much more than what I can give.

Finally - **accompany the marginalized and use every possible means to support them.** This is what Stan did. He relinquished all positions and power to be with the adivasis. He would always put the adivasis in the forefront. I remember during many meetings, he would bring the adivasis along and ensure that they speak. He would tell, 'you must speak'. He will ensure and train them to speak and express themselves. Once again, as Fr. Arrupe said, "It is the oppressed who must be the principal agents of change. The role of the privileged is to assist them; to reinforce with pressure from above the pressure exerted from below on the structures that need to be changed."

Today, as we remember Fr. Stan, I do not want to mourn. In fact, I see Stan more alive today and feel more energized, motivated and impelled. I was fortunate to speak to him over whatsapp just 15 days before he died. I was worried about what to say. But as soon as he saw me on the phone, he made it so easy with his usual smile and excitement. "Hi Jeyaraj, how are you?" When I told him that we are praying and campaigning for your release, his immediate response was, "Not for me, I am only an individual but work for the thousands of adivasis who are in prison. They must be released and they must go home. You must work for them." A mandate given to me.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us celebrate his life and also his death. On 5th July was his birthday in heaven. So let us celebrate, celebrate his birth in heaven. His death is not the end. His death has given rise to many more voices speaking loud and clear. He has sown the seed of hope in many more people when he said, "A caged bird can still sing". Although we cannot accept the pain and suffering that were inflicted upon Stan over the last 9 months in prison, I also want to thank the Indian government. His suffering has opened the eyes of millions of people all over the world today, to see and listen to the unjust reality of adivasis in India. People are getting united. But will we stop only at praising Stan while there are millions that are being exploited? That is the question that Stan would raise before us today.

If Stan was with us, what would he tell us? What impact has he made on us? What is the inner transformation or conversion that he is inviting us to bring about in our lives, in our surroundings and in our mission? 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on, take the torch of justice and truth and be a lamp shedding light to others, not a lamp that is hidden under a bushel'.

May God grant eternal rest to Stan and may Stan accompany each one of us as we try to fulfil God's mission in our lives.

Xavier Jeyaraj SJ
Secretary, SJES