



PRAY Creator Spirit, be near us as we begin a new Church year. Strengthen us when things fall apart. Walk with us as we seek to be whole and holy this Advent. Amen.

SPiRIT

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Outside St. Paul High School it's dark at six thirty in the morning in December. Inside this school in Santa Fe Springs, California, more than 550 students gather for Eucharist with Bishop Alex Salazar. It's Advent and time to walk the streets of Los Angeles to raise money for the Los Angeles Catholic Worker Soup Kitchen.

"You are one body, one Spirit in Christ," the bishop says. "You will make an impact. You are here because you believe all people have basic human rights—the right to eat, to be clothed, to have shelter because each of us is truly a child of God."

Bishop Alex closes Mass by asking students, parents, and alumni to take off their shoes. Everyone looks bewildered. He then asks everyone to hold the shoes up in the air. He

proceeds with a blessing, saying, "Bless these shoes and those who are wearing them as they walk for those who go hungry. May they have strength to walk the 26-mile route."

Students and alumni climb on buses for the ride north and step out into Salazar Park, East Los Angeles, and stream up the sidewalk—a river of gray sweatshirts and blue jeans. The March for Hunger begins.

Retired religion teacher Dan Jiru started this march in 1972. He and a few students from his religion classes made the first walk, circling around the school block. Mr. Jiru inspired social responsibility in St. Paul students for almost 30 years. He died two a half



Bishop Alex Salazar blessing the shoes of all those walking.

weeks after the 39th March on December 4, 2011.

Today students walk 26 miles and give the Catholic Worker its

largest single donation. Nearly 900 students, alumni, parents, and friends participate.

The March for Hunger starts in East Los Angeles, follows Chavez Avenue to the Mexican market on Olvera, moves north through Chinatown, and turns west on Sunset Boulevard all the way to the beach in Santa Monica.

The walk is fun. Students have all day to complete it. A guy gives his girlfriend a piggyback



Dan Jiru

HUNGER WALK:



Photo: Br. Denis O'Sullivan, All City Pix



Students in the gym during Mass.

ride but not far. Roses bloom on green lawns. Yellow acacia blooms hang from trees. Students walk the sunny side of the street in the cool morning and the shady side in the warm afternoon.

At McDonald's many stop for breakfast, bathroom breaks, and chats with friends. Others line up for bakery sweets. A lamppost ad warns against obesity.

Midmorning two seniors carrying pizza stop to take off their sweatshirts. They explain the pizzas are for homeless people they know they will see along the way.

On the sides of building and the walls behind the cash registers inside businesses are paintings of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

A man in an SUV turns a corner and asks two students what they are doing.

"A walk for hunger," they reply.

"Cool," he says and drives on.

A homeless man sits on the sidewalk eating pizza. The two seniors have walked by.

Every walker has a story.

"I walked all four years all 26 miles."

"I only made 20 that year in the rain."

"My mom went to St. Paul's and did the walk; now I'm doing it."

At the Olvera Market, friends eat, hang out, and give their feet a rest after six and a half miles. A mariachi band plays in the street. Christmas decorations blow overhead.

Out on Sunset Boulevard below the Hollywood hills, students string out in bunches of friends. Their white t-shirts identify them. BMWs, Lincoln Navigators, and Mercedes speed by.

Jackie and her group of friends pause at a corner. "Our teachers explained the walk to us our first year in school," she says. "We know what we are walking for. We pay \$55 to take this walk." Jackie is the first generation in her family to go to school in the U.S. and to think about going to college. "My mother is Mexican, and my dad Bolivian. I've seen my mom donate a lot to our parish as I grew up, which made me want to do the walk."

The sun is sinking on Sunset Boulevard. Two Rolls Royces pull out of Starbucks.

In Beverly Hills mansions appear on both sides of wide streets, many with high well-trimmed hedges to hide them and gates to keep people out. Lavish lawns invite a quick sitdown. Flowers cascade along walks. Students met Wynonna Judd out for a walk one year.



Photo: Br. Denis O'Sullivan, All City Pix

At Whittier the walk turns south toward Wilshire Boulevard. Huge sycamore trees overhead make the streets look elegant. Four girls sit on a curb waiting for friends to catch up. Students never walk alone but always in groups. Making new friends is part of the walk. At 4:45, December dark is falling and students wearing shorts put their hoodies up and caps on for the final miles.

The Hunger Walk is both a spiritual pilgrimage and a very physical experience. Step after step, students slowly internalize what it is like to be homeless and wandering the streets on punishing sidewalks.

At the beach in Santa Monica, homeless folks with their belongings in shopping carts are bedding down for the night. Only an orange glow remains where the ocean meets the sky. The shore wind is vigorous, the grass soft.

Sophomore boys from Don Bosco High School are sitting on the grass at the beach, the first to arrive there about 4:45. "My feet are seriously killing me," says Victor, who finished two hours earlier than last year. "I have been working out. I wanted to do a little better than last year."

"I just came to the United States and I didn't know there were poor people here," says senior Jun Cho. "Doing this march helps people who are going through a hard time right now."

Jamie Lizada feels like he got a reality check. "I saw disabled people alone, crazy people seeking help, and hungry people begging for food," he says. "Where I live everyone is well-

"I heard about the walk from all of the older kids," says Janice Rojas. "But it's a completely different thing doing the walk yourself. You see someone homeless walking by pushing a cart; you look down at your feet and want to give up. But seeing who you are helping makes you want to keep going."

SUNDAY GOSPEL

1st Sunday of Advent

Your God is near.

NARRATOR: Jesus was teaching his disciples in the courtyard of the temple.

JESUS 1: Before the great day there will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars.

JESUS 2: On the earth nations will suffer, frightened by the roar of the sea and the height of the waves.

JESUS 3: People will die of fright when they anticipate what is coming upon the earth. The planets will be shaken.

JESUS 4: Then people will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud in great power and glory.

ALL: When these things happen, stand up straight and raise your head, for God who will save you is near at hand.

JESUS 1: Be on guard.

JESUS 2: Think of more than eating, drinking, and becoming successful, or the great day will catch you by surprise like a trap.

JESUS 3: This great day will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth, so watch.

JESUS 4: Pray for strength to escape and stand safely before the Son of Man.

Luke 21.25-28, 34-36



Photo: Br. Denis O'Sullivan, All City Pix



Photo: Br. Denis O'Sullivan, All City Pix

to-do, but on the walk my eyes were opened to how life really is for those living in poverty.”

Hector Palencia is a graduate of St. Paul High School, who teaches religion at Don Bosco Tech. He has interested more than 100 students in making the walk. “If you talk to any St. Paul alum,” says Hector, “you will hear the walk made a difference to them. I made the walk even after I was out of school.”

Kristin Matuz, another alum and science teacher, is loading students on buses to return to St. Paul’s. “Ours is the first family to have three generations do the walk,” she says. “You may start out with a group of friends and by the end be with a whole new group. The pain is worth it. It’s amazing what we have done for the soup kitchen.”

Back at the high school parents grill hot dogs and set out a meal for hungry walkers as they limp off the buses.

“Socially conscious students are struck by seeing the poverty and degree of homelessness,” says Sister Beatrice, a religion teacher. “As they keep going and get more tired, they see increasing wealth and experience less accessibility to bathrooms. The longer part of the walk is in richer neighborhoods, which represent the smallest part of our population.”

“Not many people can say they have walked 26 miles for someone other than themselves, but I can,” says Dolores Arias. “It’s all about being thankful for what you have and realizing what’s going on outside of your own little bubble.”

“Just because the homeless don’t have as much stuff as we do doesn’t make them less human,” says Nicole Morales. “I have so many blisters on my feet, but every blister is worth it.

A few days of pain is worth making a difference in someone’s life.”

“I feel the walk made me a better person,” says sophomore Robert Vargas. “I was part of something that helped some of those unfortunate people realize there was hope. It made me realize how lucky I am to eat good meals every day. I know that if I wasn’t fortunate, I would look for help and support from others.”



Photo: Br. Denis O'Sullivan, All City Pix

QUESTIONS

- 1 What appeals to you about doing the hunger walk?
- 2 What makes the pain worth it?
- 3 What experiences have you had of making a pilgrimage like this walk?
- 4 What problems scare you in our world today?
- 5 When have you experienced that God is near you?
- 6 What are ways to stand up straight and raise your head to God this Advent?



Advent celebrates God's road in our world.

Imagine your future as a road that lies ahead. Its hills offer visions. Its bends hide what is coming. Roads are an Advent theme as the Church celebrates its new year on the 1st Sunday of Advent and remembers the roads believers have traveled in history.

Out of faith students walk Cesar Chavez Avenue to Sunset Drive and Wilshire in Los Angeles each year. They celebrate Advent with their hunger walk that is a pilgrimage on the streets and roads where the homeless wander and the rich drive expensive cars.

For Jews history is never an endless cycle of seasons but a promise of God's faithfulness. "The days are coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah," the prophet Jeremiah says in Sunday's first reading.

We, the Church, are a pilgrim people until Christ comes again. The Second Vatican Council explains that "until the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim

Church... carries the mark of this world which will pass and takes its place among the creatures which groan, suffer the pains of childbirth, and await the revelation of the children of God" (Lumen Gentium #48).

A road is a metaphor for the journey each of us makes in life, the path we create with our choices. On the road we climb hills and walk dark valleys. We follow bends that take us beyond where we imagine we are going.

Perhaps I take an advanced math class that pulls me toward engineering. Perhaps I volunteer to run a food drive at school and realize I'm good at organizing and want to help make life fairer for poor people.

Our journeys bring us to crossroads where we have to choose a direction for moving ahead. We find our path by walking and making choices as we go, such as where to apply for college or whether to continue taking music lessons.

On our journeys we meet other travelers, coming from other directions or joining us side by side for a while. They influence us. World and national events influence us.

Every Advent we hear echoes of the prophet Second Isaiah who envisions a road home from exile in Babylon about 540 B.C. "Prepare the way of the Lord," Isaiah says. The Persian king Cyrus sends the exiles home. They find a road through the wilderness as their ancestors found a dry path through the sea.

The roads and streets the St. Paul students walk take them on a spiritual journey.

They pound the cement sidewalks as the homeless do. They have to find bathrooms and places of rest. They travel among rich and poor and experience in their own tired legs and bodies the cost of providing meals for the homeless at the Catholic Worker.

The students walk farther than they ever imagined. They make a difference together they never could alone. They experience the power of common cause for ending hunger.

We celebrate new year's day in the Christian calendar not with confetti but with Advent wreaths and four candles marking the weeks of preparation for Christmas. For Christians Jesus fulfills God's promises and we continue his work.



St. Paul Students March for Hunger.



Journeys fill Israel's history. God calls Abraham and Sarah to a new land and promises them descendants as numerous as the star. They travel to the new land and make a journey of faith as they await a child.

Moses leads the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt where they journey 40 years in the desert and become a people of the commandments.

FAITH in ACTION

Imagine your future as a road that lies ahead. Close your eyes, listen to music while one person reads slowly the following questions to prod your imagining. Leave at least a minute between questions. Where is home? Where will I be when I get where my road of life is going? Who do I see traveling on the road ahead of me? What parts of the road to my destination are under construction? What is a road I want to walk this Advent? Journal for five minutes to record your reflections.

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