

From the Desk of Fr. Rick Frechette

Who are *you*, to talk like *that*, to a rainbow?"

These are strange words, of course, and I am the first to admit it. They might make a little bit of sense to you in a minute.

Storm clouds are never very good news for a country tottering on the edge of survival. Even the superpowers brace for super storms, and as we have seen, often do so in vain. How much can we do before the gigantic forces of nature?

Storms bring the obvious problems of floods, mud, and homelessness, trees that crush people and buildings, and objects that deliver their destruction by flying on the wings of savage winds. We saw this again yesterday.

Less obvious problems are the weakening of infrastructures, like our own hospitals when no one can get to work, when power is lost, when the sick are sopping wet and shivering cold because buildings made to protect from heat and sun above cannot protect against rain coming sideways on high gusts of wind.

I am thinking at the moment of Fr. Francilome, who was brought to us in a coma yesterday after a terrible car accident in the drenching torrent. He came for a CT scan of his head, so we could send him to a private hospital with capacity for neurologists and neurosurgeons. It was pathetic to me, how in such a conditions as yesterday, we could not offer him much protection from the same storm that so hurt him.

"Let us pray." His signature words, far from his silent lips now, are now our words for him. Let's use them full heartedly.

Less obvious still, brought by life's storms, is the inward journey of storm chaos. We human beings absorb it. We take it in. Some, sadly, welcome it as "home", as "how it is", never to be otherwise. Fate. The storm damage is also emotional and spiritual.

The nearby river rises and rises, fed afresh from the mountain rains, ripping wider canyons along its track, as it is forced to take more water than it was carved to handle. Storms dumps whole lakes worth of water on mountains, and these lakes seek the sea.

The river is so fast and furious that if you fall in, even if you are the best swimmer or super athlete, you are lost and taken to your death. On the river banks, hundreds of residents of a tent city, mouths wide open before yet another force of destruction, take the scene deep into themselves and try to make plans for escape, as they clutch their children: plans to go where? With whose help?

If there were such where's and who's, they would not even be on this riverbank, almost three years after the earthquake robbed them of even subsistence wellbeing. What is the emotional and spiritual toll these tragedies take on them, in this storm?

Or, think of the children in our orphanages, and the hundreds of orphanages round the country. Young minds and hearts, with damaged feelings and spirits from so many tragedies already at such a tender age, safe in a building but hiding from another manifestation of doom.

And what do storms do to people like me and you? We are helpers, and often enough wounded helpers with our own problems and sorrows.

How many stresses and strains does it take before we become cynical, before we don't want to hear any more, before we don't care?

It is to be expected that that can happen.

But let's not say it is normal.

Let's never say it's normal.

It can never be normal for human beings not to care about each other.

I started making my rounds at 4am yesterday to all our mission sites, winds and rains still railing. At 5am, some police approached St Damien Hospital just as I returned from St Luke Hospital and before heading to Cite Soleil. A police car approached, sputtering along, emergency lights barely flickering. Out came a screaming woman. She buckled over in the hospital lobby, dropped to her knees and lowered her head onto the chair.

I ran for the only help anywhere nearby, a clean white towel from my office, since I could see she was about to have a baby. I caught the baby from behind, into the towel, and cleaned off our newborn brother and stimulated his cry.

As I held him, aware that my arms were the first ever to hold him, I was on my knees behind the crouching mother, a woman from a poor tent city, who now had her baby in a bloody public scene, during a hurricane.

Neither of us could move, until we had help to cut the umbilical cord and untangle ourselves from this bizarre scene. It was one of those moments when life seems absurd, cruel, and random of meaning. I looked out at the storm, and knowing full well what life conditions awaited this baby within hours, I cynically said "Lot's of luck, kiddo!"

Suddenly, I felt the presence of the kindly forces that guide those who allow such guidance in their lives. Those who deeply understand living faith know what I mean. I was led to understand immediately that my cynicism had no place, and was dangerous to me, to my own path, to the baby in my arms. The kindly forces asked me if I was sure of what I had said. It is not that I heard a voice. But I was challenged and I felt the question put straight to me, "Who are you, to talk that way to a rainbow?"

Noah was given the sign of a rainbow, the sign of contradiction to the destruction of the storm. I was given the sign of a child. Yes, who am I, to talk with such arrogance and cynicism?

So, correctly and gratefully chastened, I murmured this prayer to the little rainbow in my arms: "I wish you the blessing of even half the love and strength I have known in this life. Welcome to our world, a little rough around the edges, but it's a beautiful place."

That there are storms and clouds in life, there is no doubt. But that there are silver linings, there is no doubt either. Thankfully, the signs are everywhere, to encourage us and quicken us in the work God has given each of us to do.

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