

Blessed is the Memory



Reflections on the Life and Message of Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN





Blessed is the Memory

I think continually of those who were truly great...

Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.

Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun,

And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

Stephen Spender



*May these reflections lead us to breathe in "vivid air"
the memory of one who was "truly great."*

We Remember Sister Dorothy Stang.

After 40 years of working with the families of poor farmers in Brazil, this Sister of Notre Dame de Namur was murdered on February 12, 2005. The world is blessed by the memory of her life and death.

Sister Dorothy did not know that she was among the "truly great." In simplicity and joy she reached out to each day's opportunities. Her life was lived in focused response to the grace of the ordinary – moment by moment, day by day. She traveled through the ups and downs of life with a vibrant hope. Even when the reality of evil put dread in her soul, she continued to hope because she truly believed that God is Good!

This booklet brings us the reflections of people who treasure the blessedness of Sister Dorothy Stang.

May these reflections lead us to breathe in "vivid air," signed with the memory of one who was "truly great."

May we be blessed by the memory of Sister Dorothy Stang.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

February 12, 2007

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The Journey Continues

The following is taken from reflections of Dom Erwin Krautler, Bishop of Xingu, Brazil. Bishop Krautler was both bishop and friend to Sister Dorothy Stang. Their relationship was one of friendship and admiration. Dom Erwin celebrated the Eucharist near Anapu where Dorothy was murdered. These are his reflections:

The scene is impressive and moving. Virgin forests, centuries old. It is the forest as God created it. Beautiful. Dark green. It seems eternal. A road cuts through this virgin forest. It is a new road, still fresh. It slopes gently uphill.

There at the top of the hill, in the shadows of huge trees, right in the middle of the road, softly bathed in sunrays, stands a white cross. It is surrounded by a garden recently planted. The horizontal beam of the cross reads: "Dorothy Mae Stang" and the vertical wood above her name holds a star and a birth date: "June 7, 1931."

Now it is the offertory. I offer the bread and wine: "Fruit of the land and the work of human hands." This gesture represents the labor, sweat, struggle, pain and suffering of so many people. It also represents the love and care of the people who have planted this garden.

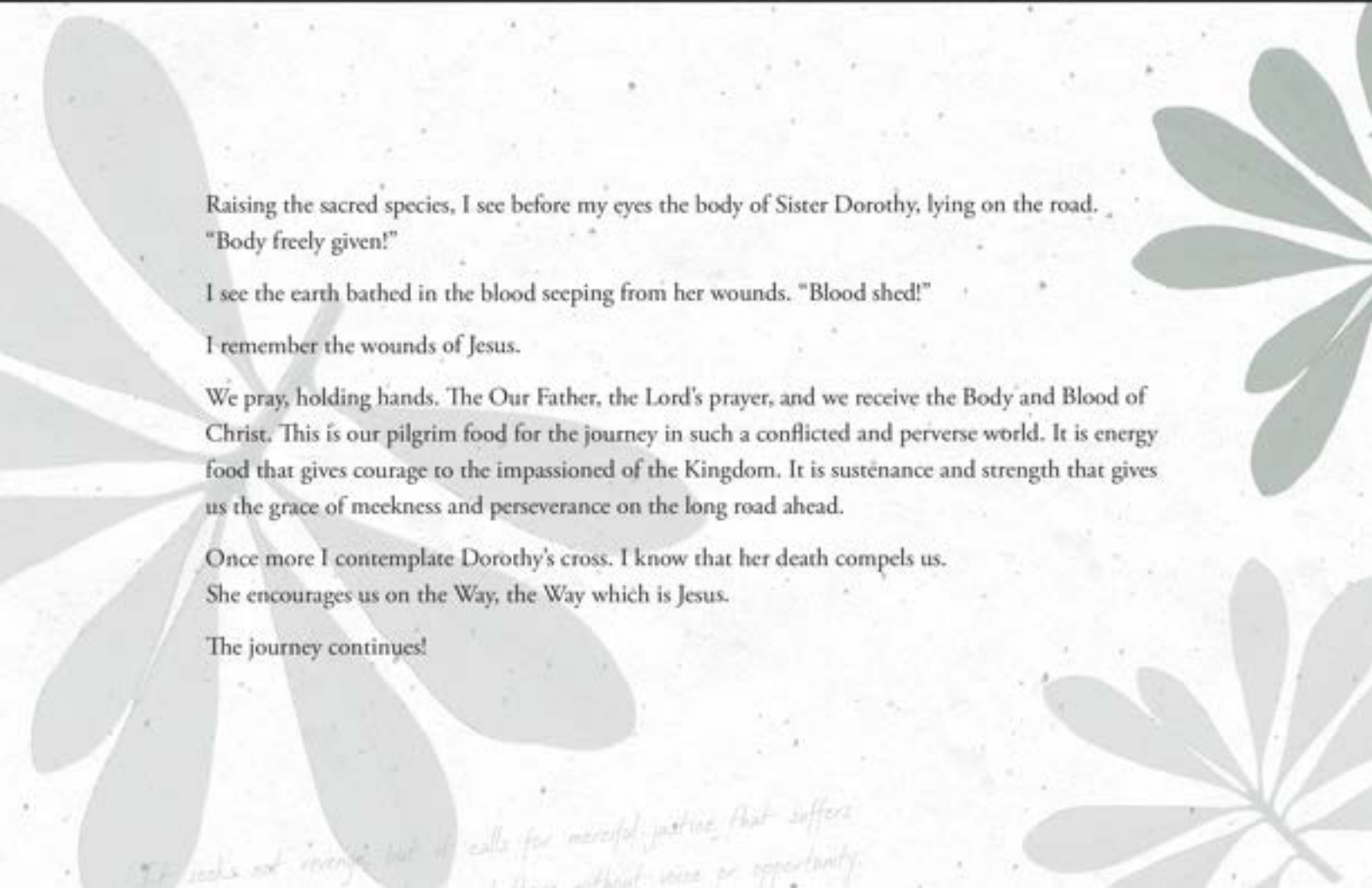
*...our hands. The Our Father, the Lord's
prayer, and we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.*

Below, there is a tiny cross and the date: "February 12, 2005." It was here that the barbarous crime was committed.

I contemplate the cross. It is white, simple, exuding tenderness. The green world surrounding it is silent.

All the trees, great and small, the bushes and vines, all were present on that fateful Saturday when they witnessed, astonished, the cruel death of their sister. Immediately all became silent. But the silence is no longer tranquil and peaceful. It is a mortal silence in the middle of the forest; a silence that accuses; a silence of blood poured out, once more crying to God on Amazonian soil. How long, O Lord! Have mercy! Have mercy! Give us peace!

The silence is not without a message. It speaks to the heart, touches the soul and tugs at our being. I have a sense of standing on holy ground. Yes, that's what it is! It is holy and sanctified ground. This is land marked by the blood of an innocent Sister. It is land that drank the blood of one who gave her life until the end; land where God hears the cry for justice. It seeks not revenge, but it calls for merciful justice that suffers with the poor, the marginalized and those without voice or opportunity.



Raising the sacred species, I see before my eyes the body of Sister Dorothy, lying on the road.
"Body freely given!"

I see the earth bathed in the blood seeping from her wounds. "Blood shed!"

I remember the wounds of Jesus.

We pray, holding hands. The Our Father, the Lord's prayer, and we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. This is our pilgrim food for the journey in such a conflicted and perverse world. It is energy food that gives courage to the impassioned of the Kingdom. It is sustenance and strength that gives us the grace of meekness and perseverance on the long road ahead.

Once more I contemplate Dorothy's cross. I know that her death compels us.
She encourages us on the Way, the Way which is Jesus.

The journey continues!

*It seeks not revenge, but it calls for merciful justice that suffers
without voice or opportunity.*



When the Great Tree Falls

"When great trees fall in forests, small things recoil into silence, their senses are eroded beyond fear... Lions bunker down in tall grasses, and even elephants lumber after safety." (Maya Angelou)

When great souls die we are reduced to unutterable silence, a cloud of darkness. The temple veil is rent again. All day long after her murder, the body of this dedicated, earthy woman, Dorothy, lay on the ground in the arms of Mother Earth. Held gently, we pray, by the rich, dark, muddy soul – washed, caressed, blessed and cleansed by the continuing rains of the forest she loved so much. When the police finally retrieved her body in late afternoon, it is said that she was still soft and had a pleasant look on her face. I imagine Dorothy died the same way she lived, with her ever-hopeful smile and radiant eyes. Her smile is not to be forgotten.

Though small, in stature only, I remember Dorothy as a strong woman. (Once, with one arm, she pulled me to safety from an undertow that was carrying me out to sea in Sao Luis.) Dot was very down to earth and unassuming in many ways. She was soft spoken and had a smiling countenance with a twinkle in her eyes. Indeed, she was a woman who knew how to love and how to believe in life, in people, and the possibility of change.

"When great trees fall in forests, small things recoil into silence, their senses are eroded beyond fear... Lions bunker down in tall grasses, and even elephants lumber after safety."

*Dorothy, your life sang of the goodness of
God. The whole world is your home now.*

Dorothy's great love of life was expressed in many ordinary ways – swimming in the ocean, admiring trees or flowers, making big, big pancakes for the community, eating ice cream or enjoying a good beer (She was from Ohio!). Equally, she enjoyed walking great distances into the villages, listening to people's stories, sleeping in their shanty houses, sharing with the scriptures and her indefatigable hope for life – life in abundance, as scripture says.

Dorothy was ordinary; extraordinarily ordinary. No one, much less Dorothy, could have imagined the impact of her life and death internationally. She herself would be totally surprised that so much press and notoriety have come from her death! Dorothy is the stuff that legends are made of – but she is not a legend. She is real! And so is her story, which we remember today.

Dorothy, your life sang of the goodness of God. The whole world is your home now. Your dream continues on; your strength emboldens us; your love has sown seeds deep in our hearts and in the hearts of the poor and the rain forest, which you loved so much. We hope for the grace to continue your struggle for justice.

Marlene de Nardo
Friend and co-worker of Dorothy
April 2005



The Power of Martyrdom

The assassination of Sister Dorothy Stang has a clear dimension of martyrdom that we now have a responsibility to recognize, record, give value to and proclaim. The blood of Sister Dorothy shed on the soil of Para, just as the blood of all the martyrs who, like Christ, have given their lives for the gospel, is a fertile seed of life and justice. It is a seed that must now be preserved and cultivated as a precious heritage for the church and for society. The martyrdom of Sister Dorothy has already awakened the dulled consciences of so many people, of society and of the government.

However, it is the example of Sister's life above all, sealed now with martyrdom, that points out the arduous journey that we are called to make as Christians: to bring gospel values to society so that it organizes itself according to the criteria of justice, dignity, respect for the rights of the person and life for all.

The life of Christ was a living gospel, expressed in His words and His actions of love and solidarity. The gospel of Christ today needs to be proclaimed from the starting point of a credible involvement in the agenda of the kingdom of God, as Sister Dorothy's life exemplifies. May the power of her martyrdom stimulate all of us to be credible witnesses of the gospel as we carry out our mission.

Sister Dorothy, martyr of Christ in the land of the Amazon, pray for us!

Fr. Demetrio Valentini
President of Caritas of Brazil
Rome, Italy March 2005

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The Mystery of Love

"How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" How do you understand the soul of one who so loves the poor that she is willing to give her life for them? How do you comprehend the power of one who, even in death, is touching the hearts of people throughout the world?

We will never be able to know or understand the depth of love in the soul of Sister Dorothy Stang. That is between God and Dorothy. What we can see is a woman who, from her childhood, knew that God loves her. Nourished in that love by her parents, her teachers and, yes, even her siblings, she grew into a woman of conviction, of dedication and of sacrifice,

Dorothy lived her life for God. Her love for her good God radiated through her blue eyes and through her smile. Her love for her people, an extension of her deep love of God, conquered fear and gave her the courage she needed to do God's work.

Her concern was always the welfare of the poor and the preservation of the earth. Even as she faced her assassins, she held in her hands her only weapon – the Bible. And she read to them the Beatitudes. Six

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But how do you hold a moonbeam in your hand? You don't! You can't!

bullets ended her life on earth. Six bullets tried to solve a problem like Sister Dorothy. But how do you hold a moonbeam in your hand? You don't! You can't! The voice of Sister Dorothy is being heard around the world; that moonbeam is radiating in the hearts of people in every corner of the earth.

We must keep that voice alive. We must be Dot's voice crying out for the welfare and the dignity of the poor, for the preservation of God's gift of earth.

Dorothy was called by God for a special work. She answered that call. We are called to carry on her work and we must answer that call.

We must join our voices with hers to demand justice for the poor and oppressed. We must cry out against the misuse and destruction of the earth. We must keep alive Dorothy's dream of a world where all God's people can live a life of hope, dignity and peace.

Sister Joan Krimm, SNDdeN
Friend of Sister Dorothy, March 19, 2005



Living Blessedness

Scripture: Matthew: 5:3-12

Words of Sister Dorothy Stang

Blessed are the poor in spirit; the reign of God is theirs.

"If we strip ourselves of all our extras that consume so much of our time and thoughts on how to care for them, our left-over time is no longer colored and it is no longer hard to give a Gospel response."

Blessed are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.

"I don't want to flee, nor do I want to abandon the battle of the farmers who live without any protection in the forest."

Blessed are the lowly; they shall inherit the land.

"We need to be poor with the poor and re-appropriate a kind and tender relationship with Mother-Earth. Then we will know how to act."

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice; they shall have their fill.

"Our Gospel response calls us to take risks among our people. They don't have this privilege or they would be killed if they resist openly – indeed, they are killed."

If we strip ourselves of all our extras that consume so much of our time and thoughts on how to care for them, our left-over time is no longer colored and it is no longer hard to give a Gospel response.

Blessed are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.

"We can't talk about the poor. We must be poor with the poor and then there is no doubt how to act."

Blessed are the single-hearted; for they shall see God.

"I know they want to kill me, but I will not go away. My place is here alongside these people who are constantly humiliated by persons who consider themselves powerful."

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called children of God.

"We are a global people – one family. A deep Christian value is sharing. I am an instrument to help them come together. I am a person free to do that"

Blessed are those persecuted for holiness' sake; the reign of God is theirs.

"I light a candle and look at Jesus on the cross and ask for the strength to carry the suffering of the people. Don't worry about my safety. The safety of the people is what's important."

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven.

"My heart screams joy, but I'm needing patience as it (reform) can't happen overnight. How to maintain hope alive has been a challenge. I have to be with these people. If it means my life, I want to give my life."

Sister Joan Krimm, SNDdeN

Friend of Sister Dorothy



We believe that her struggle did not end with her death, but continues on alive and growing.

Her Struggle Continues

We have accompanied the prophetic journey of Sister Dorothy and, at the news of her death, we feel a deep and profound pain cutting through the dreams and hopes of the people of our country.

We join others in the cry for justice that springs from the earth soaked with the blood of our sister. Dorothy was assassinated by six bullets, of which three were fatal and symbolic. One bullet reached her head, another her heart, and another her womb. Those who killed her wanted to eliminate the thoughts, the feelings and the creativity of this small, humble and elderly woman. Her head, her heart and her womb were a threat to the model of economic development planted in our country, in the Amazon.

Dorothy's blood was poured out. Her life is a seed and symbol of resistance in the struggle for a sustainable model of economic development that respects both nature and people. We believe that her struggle did not end with her death, but continues on alive and growing.

Public Statement
The Conference of Religious Sisters of Brazil



She was in touch with the oneness of creation, the interconnectedness of all being. She lived and died for the cause of justice for people and reverence for God's gift of the earth.

Dorothy's Story – Our Call to Discipleship

Sister Dorothy Stang is a model of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus gave his life to proclaim the saving love of God. When Sister Dorothy was murdered, her life was not taken from her; she gave her life to proclaim the saving love of God. She gave her life all of her life, and especially at the moment of her death as she read to her killers the words of the gospel.

Sister Dorothy is a model of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the Third Millennium. She had a deep sense of the call to people today to enter into kinship with one another and with all of creation, in order to fulfill God's will for our world. She was in touch with the oneness of creation, the interconnectedness of all being. She lived and died for the cause of justice for people and reverence for God's gift of the earth.

Sister Dorothy's life inspires us to be true disciples of Jesus in our global society so that God's Will will be done, "on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Sr. Elizabeth Bowyer, SNDdeN
Friend of Sister Dorothy



Fall Fire By Brigid Deely

Grandniece of Sister Dorothy Stang

A soft wind whispers through the trees

A fiery blur of leaves, red, yellow and orange

Cloud the sight of fall

Leaves rustle, saying soon they will know the touch of the

Soft, muddy ground

An icy chill sweeps across the sky

Sending leaves on a swirling journey

Down, down

The faint scent of pumpkin spice

Floats through the air in tiny wisps

Sending a warm, comforting feeling into my heart

*An icy chill sweeps across the sky
Sending leaves on a swirling journey
Down, down*

*The faint scent of pumpkin spice
Floats through the air in tiny wisps*

Sending a warm, comforting feeling into my heart

The mostly bare trees clutch the flames

Desperately trying to save a sign of color

Once long ago you were concealed by fire

Now your fire has floated away

Whirling in search of a new adventure

As all the leaves whisper about their unknown home

As they swirl around me

I take my brother's hand

And we walk through fire



Epilogue


After working with the poor of Brazil for more than 40 years, Sister Dorothy Stang SNDdeN was murdered in the Amazon Forest on February 12, of 2005. Of course, she was proclaimed a martyr.

Shortly after her death a reporter asked, "What is the difference between a victim of murder and a martyr?" The difference is this: A victim of murder has his or her life taken by another. No one took the life of Jesus. He gave His life. No one took the life of Sister Dorothy. She gave her life all of her life because she was a disciple of Jesus.

This is what we have in common with Sister Dorothy. We too are called through our Baptism to give our lives, all of our lives, in following the way of Jesus, the way of self-giving love. We are never victims. We freely give our lives as disciples.

Actually, Sister Dorothy Stang was a very ordinary person. She was born into a family of nine in Dayton, Ohio. Inspired by the deep faith of her parents and by her teachers at Julianne High School, she entered the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at the age of 17. On her entrance

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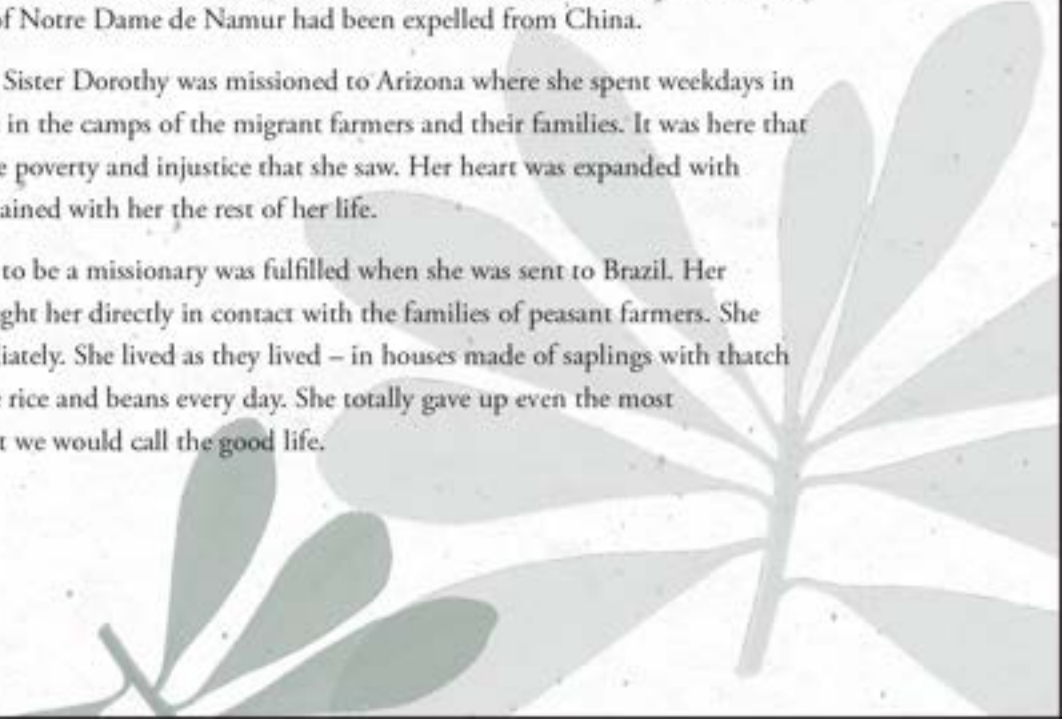


It was here that her heart was touched by the poverty and injustice that she saw. Her heart was expanded with a missionary fervor that remained with her the rest of her life.

application she said she wanted to be a missionary to China. Unfortunately, by the time she was out of the novitiate, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur had been expelled from China.

Early in her teaching career, Sister Dorothy was missioned to Arizona where she spent weekdays in the classroom and weekends in the camps of the migrant farmers and their families. It was here that her heart was touched by the poverty and injustice that she saw. Her heart was expanded with a missionary fervor that remained with her the rest of her life.

Sister Dorothy's great desire to be a missionary was fulfilled when she was sent to Brazil. Her catechetical work there brought her directly in contact with the families of peasant farmers. She identified with them immediately. She lived as they lived – in houses made of saplings with thatch roofs and dirt floors. She ate rice and beans every day. She totally gave up even the most rudimentary vestiges of what we would call the good life.



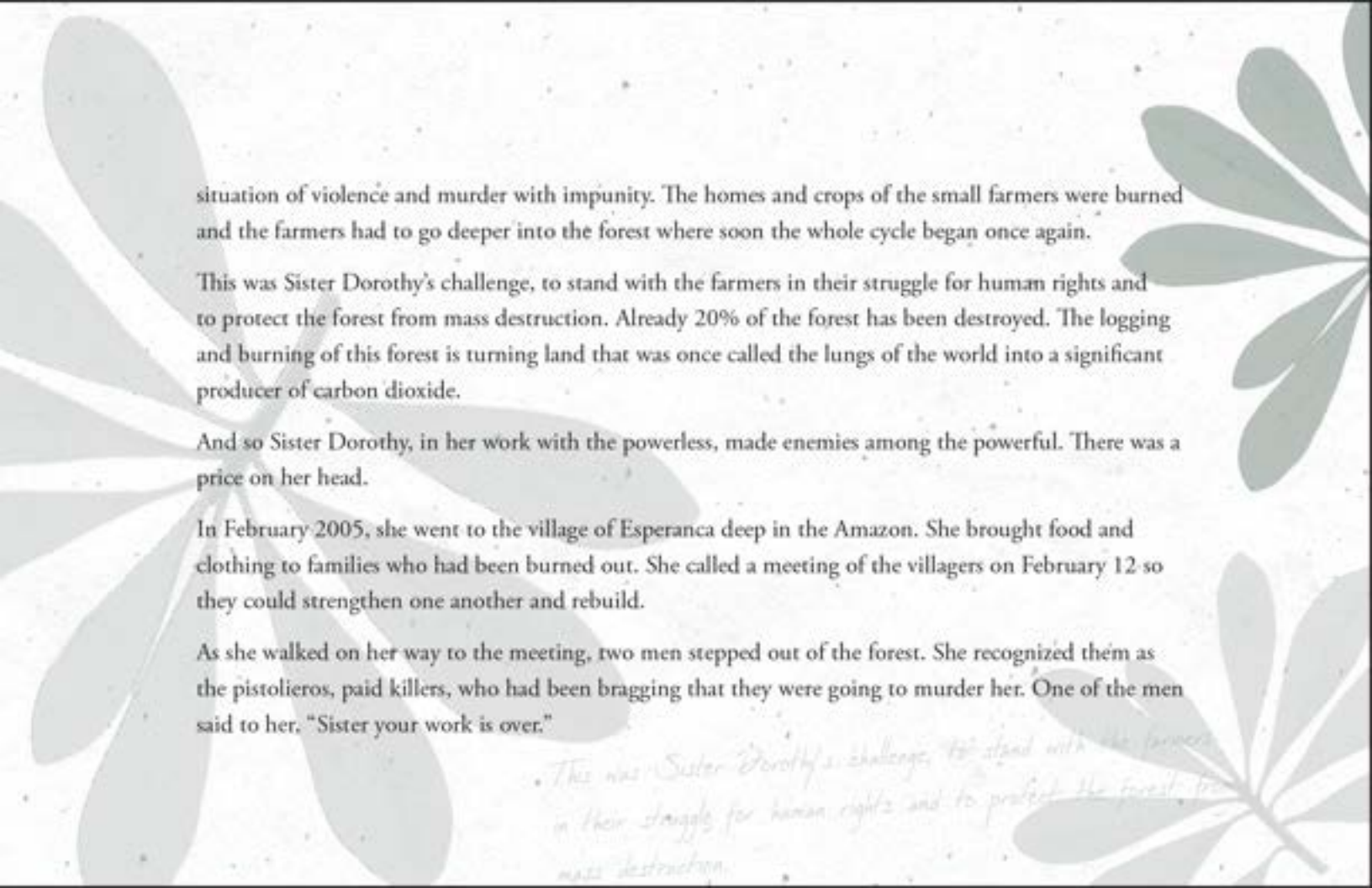
Her only possessions were the beauty of the people and the beauty of nature, yet she was vibrantly happy.

All this sounds bleak to those who are the 18% of the world's population who use 80% of the world's resources. Yet in spite of the apparent bareness of Sister Dorothy's life, she was a truly happy person. Her only possessions were the beauty of the people and the beauty of nature, yet she was vibrantly happy.

What does that say about what is essential for happiness?

In the 1980s the Brazilian government offered the farmers plots of land deep in the forest. Of course they went. This offer gave them some kind of hope of a future for themselves and their families. Sister Dorothy went with them. It was here that she grew in her love for the forest. She herself learned and then taught the farmers the skills of sustainable farming, methods of growing crops that do not destroy the forest. Most important, she brought them together to build faith communities.

But very soon she and her people experienced the effects of global trade and corporate agriculture. Large soy and cattle farmers, greedy for the profits of a global market, began to take the land of those who would not sell. This is land where the small farmers had built their houses, planted their crops and were raising their families. There were threats of violence, murder. In Para state alone, between 1985 and 2005, there were more than 500 murders over land disputes. Fewer than 10 of these ever came to trial. It was a

The background of the page features large, stylized, light green leaf patterns on the left and right sides, framing the central text.

situation of violence and murder with impunity. The homes and crops of the small farmers were burned and the farmers had to go deeper into the forest where soon the whole cycle began once again.

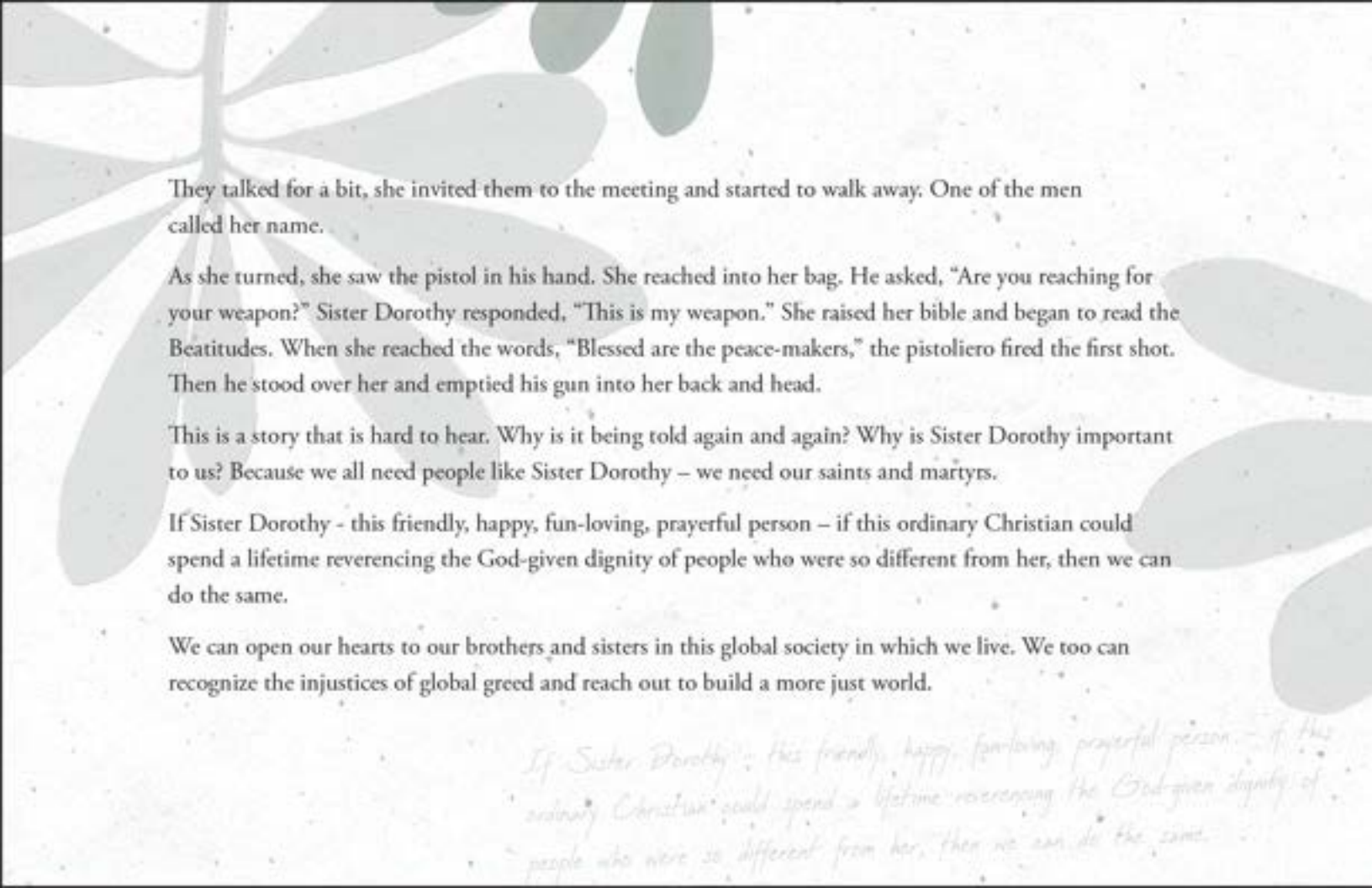
This was Sister Dorothy's challenge, to stand with the farmers in their struggle for human rights and to protect the forest from mass destruction. Already 20% of the forest has been destroyed. The logging and burning of this forest is turning land that was once called the lungs of the world into a significant producer of carbon dioxide.

And so Sister Dorothy, in her work with the powerless, made enemies among the powerful. There was a price on her head.

In February 2005, she went to the village of Esperanca deep in the Amazon. She brought food and clothing to families who had been burned out. She called a meeting of the villagers on February 12 so they could strengthen one another and rebuild.

As she walked on her way to the meeting, two men stepped out of the forest. She recognized them as the pistoleros, paid killers, who had been bragging that they were going to murder her. One of the men said to her, "Sister your work is over."

This was Sister Dorothy's challenge, to stand with the farmers in their struggle for human rights and to protect the forest from mass destruction.



They talked for a bit, she invited them to the meeting and started to walk away. One of the men called her name.

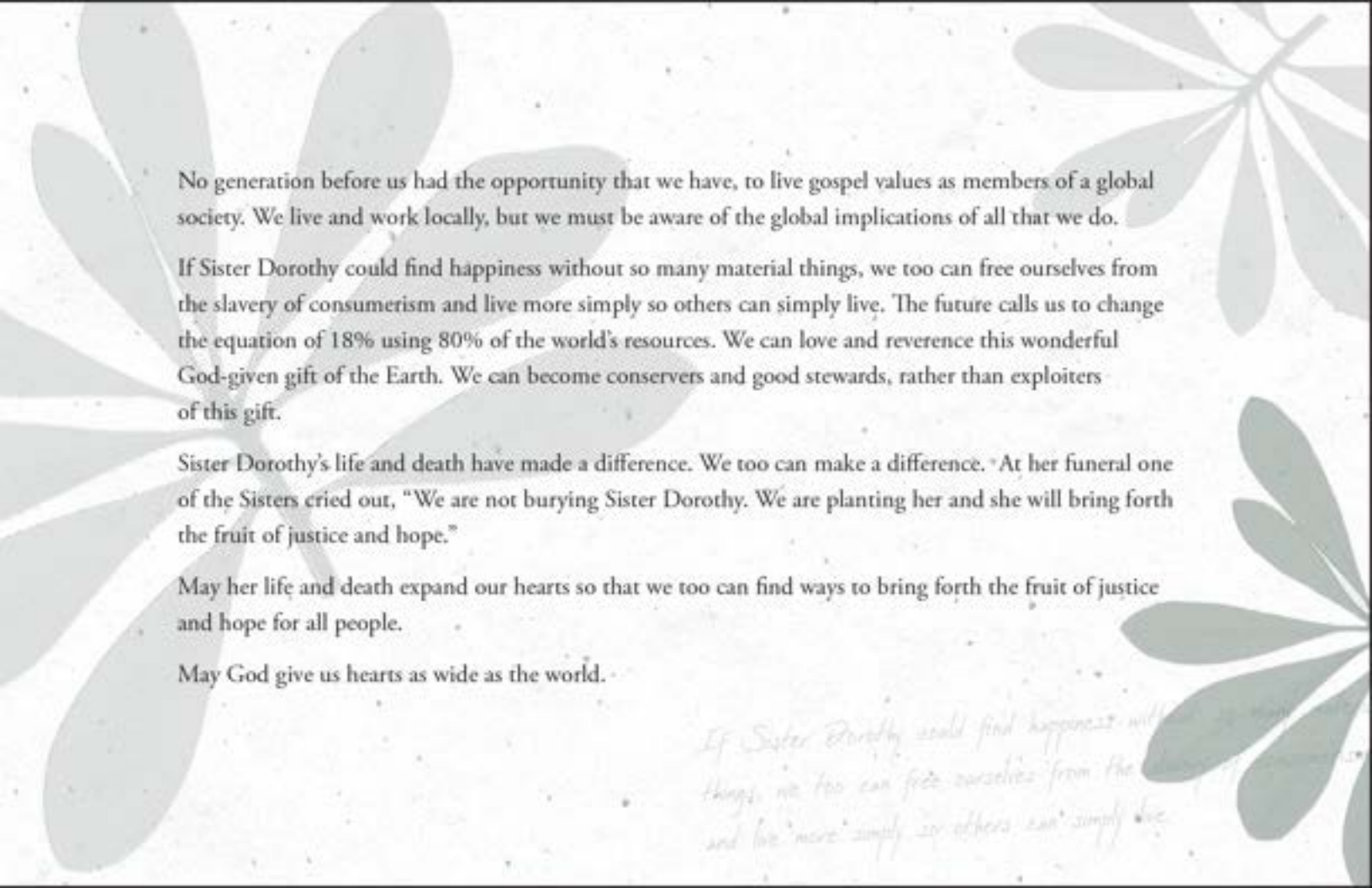
As she turned, she saw the pistol in his hand. She reached into her bag. He asked, "Are you reaching for your weapon?" Sister Dorothy responded, "This is my weapon." She raised her bible and began to read the Beatitudes. When she reached the words, "Blessed are the peace-makers," the pistolero fired the first shot. Then he stood over her and emptied his gun into her back and head.

This is a story that is hard to hear. Why is it being told again and again? Why is Sister Dorothy important to us? Because we all need people like Sister Dorothy – we need our saints and martyrs.

If Sister Dorothy - this friendly, happy, fun-loving, prayerful person – if this ordinary Christian could spend a lifetime reverencing the God-given dignity of people who were so different from her, then we can do the same.

We can open our hearts to our brothers and sisters in this global society in which we live. We too can recognize the injustices of global greed and reach out to build a more just world.

If Sister Dorothy - this friendly, happy, fun-loving, prayerful person - if this ordinary Christian could spend a lifetime reverencing the God-given dignity of people who were so different from her, then we can do the same.



No generation before us had the opportunity that we have, to live gospel values as members of a global society. We live and work locally, but we must be aware of the global implications of all that we do.

If Sister Dorothy could find happiness without so many material things, we too can free ourselves from the slavery of consumerism and live more simply so others can simply live. The future calls us to change the equation of 18% using 80% of the world's resources. We can love and reverence this wonderful God-given gift of the Earth. We can become conservers and good stewards, rather than exploiters of this gift.

Sister Dorothy's life and death have made a difference. We too can make a difference. At her funeral one of the Sisters cried out, "We are not burying Sister Dorothy. We are planting her and she will bring forth the fruit of justice and hope."

May her life and death expand our hearts so that we too can find ways to bring forth the fruit of justice and hope for all people.

May God give us hearts as wide as the world.

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things, we too can free ourselves from the
and live more simply so others can simply live.*





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