**LENT 2021 MASS TALK**

Good evening/afternoon/morning,

This weekend, our homily is on behalf of Trócaire, our overseas development agency.

Firstly, Trocaire wishes to thank you for the support you give to them each year. Your donations reach thousands of vulnerable communities and families all over the world. This support is critical and it allows Trócaire to continue their work every year.

The Lenten period is a time when people recommit their support for their brothers and sisters around the world through Trócaire’s Lenten Appeal.

This Lent, Trócaire’s Appeal highlights the impact that conflict has on people’s lives in South Sudan and how love, friendship and solidarity can help them to survive and thrive.

Awut and Ajak are two widowed mothers and brave women from South Sudan who are the face of Trócaire’s Lenten campaign this year. *[It is helpful to have a box in your hand on the altar]*

Ten years ago, South Sudan became an independent country. The people dreamt of a bright future, but sadly a civil war has cut their dream short and people are still wishing for peace.

Awut and Ajak were among the millions of people in South Sudan to lose their homes to the war. They fled their villages with nothing but the clothes on their back, trekking through miles of dangerous bushland with no food or water for themselves or their families.

Awut arrived in the community of Malek frightened, but her new neighbours welcomed Awut with loving arms. They too had little, but what they had they shared. In this remarkable community – where people who had already lost so much to war – Awut found kindness, solidarity and hope.

Awut received such love and kindness from her new neighbours. When Ajak arrived in Malek, Awut knew this was her chance to show, that love and kindness to someone else. . She shared what she had, with Ajak and her family.

Today, Awut and Ajak are best friends. Two women brought together by the horror of war are now living together with love and kindness.

Awut and Ajak are survivors. They are surviving a war, but each day remains a battle: a battle to earn money; a battle to grow food; a battle to pay for their children’s school; a battle to survive and thrive.

Their lives have been torn apart by a war they never wanted. This is the injustice of war. It is not just that they lost their homes. It is not just that they struggle each day to survive.

The solidarity and friendship between Awut and Ajak is also an example of exactly what Pope Francis tells us in his recent encyclical, Fratelli Tutti. At a time of uncertainty and fear, it reminds us to always work together and protect the most vulnerable. These values are exactly why the bishops of Ireland founded Trócaire and almost 50 years later these values of solidarity and justice have never been more relevant.

The Coronavirus crisis has shown us how small our big world is and we pray for all those affected by the virus in Ireland and around the world.

We also pray for all those living through conflict all over the world and we continue to pray for peace in the lives of Awut and Ajak and their families in South Sudan.

Last year, your generosity helped Trócaire to support 2.5 million people in over 20 countries. Everyone in Trocaire are so thankful for your support.

This Lent, your support will provide vital help to Awut, Ajak and many more like them as they try to create better futures for their families.

This year, the Lent campaign is part of UK Aid Match, meaning the UK government, up to £2m, will double public donations given by 16 May 2021. Furthermore, if a donor signs up for a monthly gift, or increases their monthly gift, before the 16thof May 2021, up to three of their instalments will be matched.

We invite and encourage you to make your donation through the traditional Trócaire box or online at trocaire.org. You can also log onto the Trócaire website to see their resources for teachers and parishes or to learn more about their campaigns.

I conclude my words with this prayer from Fr. James who is a priest in South Sudan and who is appealing to us to pray for peace in South Sudan and an end to the war:

**As we move through the Lenten time,**

**the time when we contemplate Jesus in the desert,**

**pray for us the people of South Sudan**

**and pray for peace here.**

**Accompany us, hold our hands,**

**hold the hands of the church in South Sudan.**

**Hold the hands of our brothers and sisters in South Sudan,**

**walk with us during this Lenten time.**

**Through Christ our Lord, Amen.**

*(Insert here how parishioners can collect a Trócaire box in a way that is safe for everyone e.g from the porch of the church. Donations to the Lent campaign can also be made online at www.trocaire.org)*