



## Nine Days of Grace: Novena 2018

*Grace: Pray for the grace of compassionate hearts and being faithful to our mission.*

We just heard a story about the second miracle of Jesus which took place in his hometown in Galilee. Did you notice that this miracle happens in a context where people in his hometown rejected him? Jesus acknowledges this tension by stating that a prophet has no honor in his native place. And yet, even in the context of rejection, a miracle still happens. How can this be? I could not help but try to understand the causal link between rejection and a miracle or an act of creativity. This meditative exploration is particularly important to me because I am a practicing artist as a painter and a sculptor; I see Jesus as the greatest artist of all time (and outside of time).

One possible link between rejection and creativity is that creative persons often live on the margins of society. Living at the periphery helps them to pay attention to what is not dominant in their culture. It can help them become sensitive and have an affinity with the poor, the lowly, and the outcast. Jesus is one with them. He understands their struggles and their needs—in numerous cases he protects, defends, and liberates these fortunate people. His compassionate heart shaped by the marginalized experiences also extends to all kinds of people including the commander, the establishment who suffers the loss of his child. I imagine when Jesus looks into the eyes of the royal official, he understands the pain and the tremendous loss to this father who fears his child is dying. The miracle grows out of a sensitive and compassionate character.

Creative persons, like Jesus, are often marginalized because they do not conform to the rules of the masses. It is not because they don't know and understand the rules; rather, it is because they understand the rules perfectly well, yet want to break these rules. They break rules not simply for the sake of breaking them, but because the rules once broken can bring betterment to the community. For them breaking rules allows them to share their life-giving insights which help transform people's lives. These rule breakers know what they are about; in other words, they have their own mission.

When rejection rubs against a person who has a clear sense of mission, the resulting friction only increases creative activity. The miracle, a creative act, that Jesus performs today also arises from this hostile and compelling context. His mission is to bring new life to the suffering. It does not matter to him when, where, and for whom the possibility for new life would happen. He knows who he is, what he is capable of. When the need is great, his heart



## Nine Days of Grace: Novena 2018

is moved; there is no time to wait or to follow the norm. A clear mission and a compassionate heart guide his creative action. For Jesus, rejection does not push him away from his mission but rather fuels his creative response.

The theme of this year novena, “Open our eyes, show us your face,” has a new meaning for us today. Open our eyes does not only mean to look at our surroundings, but also we can approach and see life with sensitivity and compassion. “Show us your face” reminds us that we are longing for God’s presence so we can sustain our commitment and draw our mission from this intimate relationship. Two vital factors that lead to the miracle of Jesus are his compassionate heart and his clear mission. Like what Jesus has done in today’s narrative, we are also called to respond by bringing creative solutions to challenging situations. Having a sensitive and compassionate heart, as well as being faithful to our mission, remains vital to this opportunity and exciting challenge.

*Fr. Trung Pham, S.J.*  
*Day 6 | March 12, 2018*