

Greece's Economic Woes Will Hurt Many People

Some call it a modern-day Greek tragedy; others refer to it as the new normal for the country of Greece.

Because my wife, Janice, and I moved to Athens, Greece, in 2005 and lived there for more than nine years and have many friends affected by it, we call it the number-one item in our daily prayers.

The ongoing Greek economic struggles have ushered in a raft of disturbing, life-altering and unpleasant downturns for our friends and acquaintances in this ancient, Balkan country.

These developments have crippling present-day impacts, leaving adverse scars on the hopes and aspirations of these good people for many tomorrows to come.

Greece is far more than a simple lesson in contemporary economics or a morality play about the responsibilities of borrowing and repaying money.

It is more than the latest example of a flawed attempt at European financial union, the growth struggles of an adolescent and inadequate joint monetary system or the challenges to member states' compassion, notwithstanding their widely varying histories, cultures, animosities and levels of efficiency, power and international prestige.

It represents more than a pungent reminder of how interconnected our world has become.

While the Greek troubles may be all of the above and much more, today I am thinking of the crippling and devastating effects on personhood and life potential which this Greek saga brings into sharp focus.

As long as I don't know the people affected by world events, I can more easily view them dispassionately, from a distance, in an abstract or theoretical sense.

But, as soon as I come to know well the people whose lives are being crushed and shattered by these potent political and economic events, my perspective changes.

I can no longer view them from a distance - objectively, dispassionately, critically or, indeed, judgmentally.

In these days of bank closures, food shortages and mean talk by those not personally affected by this mess or those seeking only to protect their vested interests, I am remembering that, in God's providence, 10 years ago he created through PORTA - the Albania House in Athens - a ministry among disadvantaged immigrants.

I am remembering that, from the beginning, this was a joint enterprise, supported by believers in the United States, but also serviced, cared for and assisted by Albanian immigrants in Athens, as well as good, God-fearing, Jesus-loving Greek people who sensed the higher calling to care for the immigrants that many have historically overlooked and deemed unworthy.

Ironically, as the Greek crisis staggers forward, ordinary Greek people have come to experience the deprivations of life previously reserved for foreigners and immigrants.

For example, in the hunger feeding program that PORTA supports, working with the Second Greek Evangelical Church of Athens, once proud but now needy Greek people are showing up for a hot meal, along with Albanians and other immigrants - a situation that was unheard of a few years ago.

As PORTA and her Greek partners are attempting to manage this crisis, with the unlimited hope and compassion of Jesus, but with limited resources, we are learning that this humanity business includes all of us.

We are affirming that if one is hurting, all are hurting and that human need can

no longer be completely understood as an inevitable consequence of long-held patterns of discrimination and prejudice.

The current crisis has helped us to comprehend better that the call to care for “the least of these” can as easily come to mean care for those who are like us as those unlike us.

Indeed, we are relearning that all people are created in God’s image and are persons for whom our Lord died.

Calling and caring and managing this crisis involves the capacity to see the needy as human beings just like us.

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