

January 18 & 19, 2020
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Millie Williams
Martin L. King, Jr. Celebration

Good Afternoon/morning.

Some of you may know who I am, others have seen my face, but don't know my name. My name is Millie Williams and I regularly attend the 9 o'clock mass on Sunday morning with my family.

In our readings today, God has called us to be a servant for all. In our first reading, God tells Israel they must spread God's words to all nations. In the second reading, Paul stated that he has been called by God to be an apostle for Jesus spreading the word of God; and in the Gospel, we hear that God calls on John the Baptize to announce God's begotten son, Jesus, to all.

It wasn't easy, but they were servants of God.

Moving ahead several hundred years...to the 1600's.

Slavery!! The Atlantic slave trade...oh what an evil time in America's history! From the 1600s to 1800s, Africans were stolen from their villages, put in chains and piled in slave ships to across the ocean to be sold off into slavery for the white plantation owners to take care of their lands and household for free. Africans were the property of the white men who bought them at auctions and treated them worst then the dogs on the property. Slaves were stripped of their birth names, dignity, prohibited from learning how to read and write and were beaten, foot cut off or hung from a tree if they tried to run away. Other slaves on the plantation were called to watch what happen to slaves that misbehaved or tried to escape. The white men also separated families for economic gains or punishment to the slave community. Working from sunset to sundown in poor condition and no pay, was not a life for any human. I know this is what God did not mean when God stated a "servant to all."

In 1865, the American Civil War ended, and slaves were set freed! Even though the United States Constitution, the 15 Amendment, stated that "all" people were equal, black people soon found out that this **was not** true. Segregation laws in some states were alive and well, mostly in the southern states. During those times black were not treated equally as the whites. Blacks had to attend separate school and were not allowed to vote. They were denied the rights that was guaranteed to them in the Constitution. For example: **the public transportation system in Birmingham, Alabama:**

a white person who got on the bus, paid the fare and took seat.

A black person who wanted to ride the bus, got on the bus, paid the fare, got off again, walked to the rear of the bus entering the back to get on. Blacks could only sit in the back of the bus. When a white person got on the bus and all seat were filled, blacks had to give up their seats to that white person just who got on.

Like I said earlier, racial segregation became the law in most southern states until the Civil Rights movement. These laws better known as the Jim Crow laws, which forced segregation in all public facilities, prohibited intermarriages, all transportation and education. Blacks and Native Americans suffered the most with disadvantages of economic, educational and social justice. This carried on well into the 20th century.

But God has a plan for everything.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King Jr. was born to Alberta – a schoolteacher - and Martin – a Baptist minister. His sister, Christine, brother Alfred, and him were raised in a home filled with love and the teaching of his father about self-worth and equality for all. Martin later found out the outside world of his home told a completely different story.

Growing up in the south, Martin's experiences as a black person made a permanent impression on him. He knew he had to make a change in the world. Martin, at the age of 15, accepted and attended Morehouse College where he studied religion and philosophy. At the age of 18 he was ordained a minister and became an assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church where his father was pastor. He attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, PA. at the age Of 19. Martin followed and believed in the principles of Gandhi on passive resistance and nonviolent.

After receiving his master's degree from Crozer he attended Boston University to continue his education in philosophy where he received his doctorate. This is where he met his future wife, Coretta Scott, who happen to share in the same belief and work in the civil right movement as Martin.

Martin was offered a position as pastor in Montgomery, Alabama. This is where he first put into practice his belief in passive resistance. We all know too well the story of Rosa Parks – a tired black woman who refused to give up her seat on the bus for a white person. She was arrested and taken off the bus in handcuffs. In retaliation of her arrest, the black community stage a boycott of not taking the bus the very next day. Rosa Parks went to trial and was found guilty of violating a Montgomery city ordinance – ***give up your seat for a white person***. She had to pay a fine. Soon after that, the black community form a group called the Montgomery Improvement Association and elected Martin to lead it.

The group proposed further boycott of all public transportation in Montgomery. This boycott lasted 381 days; and during that time many white people became upset and responded with violence. Martin received death threats, his house was bombed – no one was hurt, and jailed many times standing up for what he believed – *all are equal*. Black people also protested in a nonviolent way with sit-ins, marches, and boycotting business. They were threatened, beaten, attacked by police dogs, sprayed with fire hoses, dragged through the streets, went to jail and even fired from their jobs. All this because they wanted to have the same equal rights as the white people. In 1963, Martin Luther King, JR led a march in Washington, DC that was attended by over 200,000 people -black and white who believed that all are created equal. This is also where he gave his famous speech “ I had a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, ‘we hold these truths to be self-evidence, that all men (and women) are created equal...”

Martin spoke for everyone who suffered injustice and who shared his vision of freedom and equality. He led peaceful nonviolence marches and protests for unequal treatment in housing and restaurants, in voting and education while his life and the lives of his wife and four children were threatened time and time again. He never stopped working towards his dream and never lost his faith in God. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Sadly, he was shot and killed on April 3rd, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee where he was there to give support to the striking sanitation workers in that city for better pay and benefits. The civil right movement lost a great leader ... a champion of nonviolent protest... a peace-loving man of great vision... another servant of God.

*Just a note; On July 2, 1964 President Johnson signed the **Civil Rights Act** to end segregation and on August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed into law **The Voting Rights Act** that gave black people the right to vote. 100 years after the Civil War and the Constitution which stated all people are created equal...and we are still fighting today!*

Martin Luther King's dream of equality for all lives on in this parish today.

A little bit about myself. I was a very active member of Our Lady of Solace for over 30 years. So, when Solace was closed, I was mad thinking another catholic church closed its doors where people of color called home. I started wondering who is going to minister to my black brothers and sisters in the neighborhood... the poor...even ME!! My husband told me not to give up and attend the newly combined church of OLS and St. Theresa and see what happens. So, I did. I sat in the pew with my arms folded along with a fake smile.

In 2008 All Saint Parish was born. A month went by when Darris, my husband of 47 years, got a call from Fr. Fred who wanted to meet with him. Darris met with Fr. Fred and he told me the meeting went well and how they shared many interesting stories. He also stated that Fr. Fred was also twin (a big plus in Darris' book who is also a twin), but most important - Fr. Fred invited welcomed and asked Darris to think about joining the catholic faith. Darris has always shared with me how he always loved the way the catholic church celebrates the eucharist. So, he thought about it and said yes. I asked him, why now after 30 plus years of **me** asking him to join the church? Darris told me that Fr. Fred was the first catholic priest that reached out to him about becoming a catholic. The barrier that I had built up slowly started to fall. When Darris was confirmed on Holy Saturday, my arms went from this (fold arms) to this (fold hands) and less of a fake smile.

As time went on and under the spiritual leadership of Fr. Fred – who not only did the talk by telling us the injustice that is happening in the world today and how we need to work to end this evilness, but the walk by participating in peaceful nonviolence marches and protest with Black Lives Matter, LBGTQ or Mother Against Gun Violence naming just a few. His strong love and belief that all are welcome... I went to this (open my arms) and with a genuine smile.

We are not a big building like the other churches around us, but what count is the spirit... the service that we do. We are a young church (11 years young) and have grown in so many ways through our ministries to others. We accept and celebrate the diversity we have in this church during our liturgies every weekend.

Our arms reach out not only into our surrounding neighborhood, but into the community by supporting agencies such as ACTS, Oxford Inn, 100 Black Men, Eastside Food Pantry, Jamesville Penitentiary, Assumption Sandwich Ministry, Helio Health Recovery Center and La'Arch... just to name a few.

Our arms reached out to the hurricane victims of Puerto Rico and Florida. To Flint, Michigan and their water crisis. Crossing the border of Texas to Mexico to bring what limited supplies to those waiting to come to the United States.

Our arms reached out across the ocean

- to a small village in Kenya to bring medical supplies and repair their well where they get their daily water supply, money to help send children to school. We are reminded of the love and gratitude they have for this community by the carb tree plant in in front of our church

- Our arms reach to our sister village of Villanueva in Nicaragua so they can continue to purchase needed supplies for the village

- Our arms reach out to the team from All Saints that just came back from the eastern part of the Congo to continue the support of the health project and hoping that Uvira will be willing to become a sister city with us.

I am so glad that we are a sanction church – opening our doors to those in need. When we finally received our family from the Congo, the out pour of support for the family was amazing. When the Refugee Task team put out the lists of items that they needed to make the family feel welcome, All Saints answer the call. Seeing parishioners, young and old, caring items to the Annex to help the family feel welcome was truly the work of giving shelter to the homeless.

Marin Luther King once said, *“Life most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’*

Our response would be “We are just getting started.”

I do believe that God would walk into this church ...stand in the middle of this congregation ...knowing each one of us by our name...arms stretch out... and say

“Well done my good... and... faithful... servants!”

Amen