

March For Our Lives

Here are some illustrations of what Holy Week is all about:

The senseless murders of those 17 high school students in Parkland, Florida a few weeks ago on February 14 – 17 of 33,000 Americans slaughtered each year because of gun violence (and I'd note that 76 teenagers have been killed by guns since Parkland) has sparked our young people across our nation, joined by allies in cities across the world, to stand up to the powers that be and shout loudly: "Enough is enough! Stop the insanity! It doesn't have to be this way!"

*The blood of the 17... unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies...*

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38 years ago Friday, in the midst of terrible justice, oppression and violence in his native *El Salvador*, via radio, Archbishop Oscar Romero appealed directly to the members of the military:

"We are your people. The peasants you kill are our own brothers and sisters. When you hear the voice of the man commanding you to kill, remember instead the voice of God: "*Thou Shalt Not Kill...*" In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people whose cries rise up to heaven – I beseech you, I beg you, I command you: stop the repression!"

The next day, as he was celebrating Mass in the Chapel of the Carmelite Sisters' cancer hospital where he lived, a single rifle shot was fired from the rear of the Chapel. Romero was struck in the heart and died within minutes. Archbishop Romero was immediately acclaimed a martyr by the people of *El Salvador* and indeed by the poor throughout Latin America. 30 years later, he will be officially canonized as a Saint by Pope Francis later this year.

In an interview two weeks before his assassination he said:

"I have frequently been threatened with death. I must say that as a Christian I do not believe in death – but in The Resurrection. If they kill me, I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people! If God accepts the sacrifice of my life, then may my blood be the seed of liberty and sign of hope that will soon become a reality..."

"A Bishop will die, but the Church of God – the people – will never die!"

*Good Friday to Easter ... unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies...*

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This week's police shooting of an unarmed black man, although still under investigation, calls us once again as Americans to look at the sin and evil of racism, America's "original sin," that our Parish has been reflecting on this Lent. The American martyr and apostle of freedom, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said:

"Truth, crushed to the earth, will rise again: How long? Not long ... because no lie can live forever! How long? Not long ... because the arc of the moral universe is long – but it bends toward justice."

On the evening of April 3, 1968, Dr. King was in Memphis, Tennessee addressing a rally in support of the city's striking Sanitation workers:

"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And God's allowed me to go up to the mountain and I've looked over... and I've seen the Promised Land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we as a people *will get to the Promised Land!* And I'm happy tonight – I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man... *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!*"

He was assassinated the next day.

*Good Friday to Easter... unless the grain falls to the ground and dies...*

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Sisters and brothers, it's certainly not a secret that I and, I'm sure many of us, in the last 15 months have been deeply troubled by the ongoing actions of our President: the lies, the denigration of immigrants, the ban on refugees, the attempts to destroy the Affordable Care Act, the weakening of environmental standards, the 'our nation first' isolationist policies, the feeding of fear and energizing of racism, the cavalier objectification and derogatory behavior and attitudes toward women, and the list goes on... are striking against everything for which our Nation stands.

But, as a servant leader, sinful disciple of Jesus, I must share with you, that the formation in the past few weeks, of what appears to be a *war council* around the President is now *frightening* me. John Bolton – one of the architects of disastrous Iraq War – has been appointed National Security Advisor... a man who has advocated a *military solution* in Korea and the *nuclear option* in Iran... . As Christians, for who Palm Sunday begins the journey of Jesus to the Cross, I invite us to reflect on Jesus' core teaching and witness to nonviolence.

Reflecting on the Passion, we read:

“The soldiers laid hands on Jesus and arrested him; and behold one of those who accompanied Jesus, put his hand to his sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant - cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him: ‘Put your sword back into its sheath! Those who use the sword will perish by the sword.’

Sisters and brothers, ‘Put your sword back into their sheaths:’ violence begets violence, killing begets killing, nukes begets more nukes, death begets death! Jesus – the Incarnation of the God of nonviolence stands for life. Jesus will not succumb to the way of violence – though he knows that he will perish under the Cross’ violence; he places his hope in the God of life and awaits that third day...!

Sisters and brothers, two Processions entered Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday in the year 30, beginning Passover - the most sacred observance in the Jewish year:

From the West... an Imperial procession: Pontius Pilate – symbolizing power, oppression, occupation, business-as-usual ... the kingdom of Caesar.

From the East... a peasant procession: Jesus on the donkey... the King – *riding on a donkey* – will banish war from the land: no more chariots, war horses. Bows, or swords. Commanding peace to the nations – joined by the poor, the sick, the powerless: women, children, the marginalized, the outcasts.

The two processions embody the central conflict of Holy Week, the week that leads to Jesus’ crucifixion; the central conflict that continues to divide our world today.

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All of this is what Easter – the ultimate climax of Holy Week – is all about: Good Friday, the penultimate climax, discloses how powerful forces arrayed against the Kingdom of God leads to the Easter affirmation that Jesus “Is Lord” and the powers of this world are not!

Holy Week – Good Friday – Easter are about the conflict between the *normalcy* of powerful, oppressive domination systems... and Jesus’ challenge to these systems of domination, as he invites us to journey through death to Resurrection.

The personal and social meanings of Holy Week are captured in two nearly identical questions:

- ❖ Do I accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior? And his way as the path to personal liberation... as did Martin Luther King and Bishop Oscar Romero...?
- ❖ Do I accept Jesus is the ultimate Savior and Liberator of the world...?

I certainly encourage all who can, to participate in our Triduum Observance, as we – as individuals and as a Community reflect on the ultimate question: which procession are we in? which journey are we on?

Amen!