

November 24 & 25, 2012

All Saints Parish

Rev. Fred Daley

Feast of Christ the King

One of my heroes as I was growing up was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I remember watching TV on that hot August day in 1963 when I was in high-school: seeing tens of thousands of folks marching on Washington and hearing his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in the Washington Mall. I can remember thinking what courage he had! ...what a prophet he was! And, I can remember too how controversial he was: how many people hated him; called him a "Communist," a "trouble-maker;" how he really rocked the boat; turned "business-as-usual" upside-down and got people thinking - whether they agreed with him or not.

I can remember too, the deep hurt and pain when he was assassinated in April 1968; and seeing the pictures of the Black community in rage - exposing to the Nation its sin of segregation and racism....

Through the years since then, I've had many opportunities to attend Martin Luther King, Jr. Day memorials, services and events in his honor. More often than not, the Martin Luther King honored in those services and events is almost unrecognizable as my hero as a teenager and college student:

- the *fire* is gone,
- the *urgency* is gone.
- the *rage at the injustice* is gone.

Time and history toned him down, made him quite proper - hardly controversial - the nice guy that we can all embrace ...like the flag and apple pie....

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My sisters and brothers, in many ways, time and history have done the same things to Jesus, who we commemorate today as our “King.” In the last 2,000 years, over and over again, we have made Jesus in our ‘image and likeness’ and are often more comfortable with him locked up in our tabernacles and churches, with his message and mission watered-down, made safe and proper... keeping the status quo secure and comfortable...

- gone is the *fire*,
- gone is the *urgency*,
- gone is the *rage*...

and: gone is the *truth* - the truth that will set us free!

My brothers and sisters, each time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray: “*Thy kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven.*” Two thousand years ago, Jesus was born into a world in crisis - a hurting world - where the kings and ‘Pilates’ who ruled the empire and the kings and ‘Pilates’ of religion were orchestrating systems of domination and unjust power over the people. In simple terms: a relative few had all the wealth and power and prestige, while the many were powerless and struggling and oppressed.

God sent God’s Son, Jesus to the world to announce and initiate an alternative world: a vision, a dream for the world to be as God intended it to be: ...a world where all would be recognized as persons created in God’s image and likeness out of love; ...a world where all people would see each other as children of God - sisters and brothers - living in peace and justice and respect for one another. To say “thy kingdom come” is the same as saying “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”

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My sisters and brothers, two thousand years later the struggle continues and to be faithful to Jesus is to be faithful to his dream, his mission of birthing an alternative world - the world as God intends.

While the imagery of king and kingdom are quite foreign to us today, the contrast between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, the 'haves' and the 'have nots,' the oppressors and the oppressed is as stark and real as ever, and, perhaps one of the reasons that so many are leaving our Church today is because the Jesus we are proclaiming and following in the Church is the Jesus made in our image and likeness that embraces the status quo, that embraces the Principalities and Powers - the Pilates - and systems of domination and oppression.

Let me give an example of a very sad moment in our Church that happened this past Tuesday involving Father Roy Bourgeois - who I know personally - who is 74 years old and has been a Maryknoll Priest for 40+ years. Listening to the voice of Jesus, his life has been one of continual conversion. Brought-up in the segregated south, he embraced integration; experiencing the horror of war in Viet Nam, he was called to denounce war and violence - being continuously jailed for his witness for peace. Seeing the deadly result of U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador in the 1980s, he was called to renounce and protest these policies - again being jailed for his witness. In other words, he has walked the walk as a prophet for peace and justice....

In recent years, working closely with Catholic women in the peace and justice movement and hearing their stories, he came to realize there are Catholic women called to priesthood in the Catholic Church - but, of course, who are unable to fulfill this call. *In conscience* he came to believe that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is "A grave injustice against women, against our Church, and against our God." *In conscience* he felt compelled to publically support women's ordination in the Catholic Church.

Following his public statements, he received a letter from the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, ordering him to recant his statements. In reply to the Vatican, he wrote; (in part)

"What you are asking me to do in your letter is not possible without betraying my conscience. In essence you are telling me to lie and say I do not believe that God calls both men and women to the priesthood. This I cannot do; therefore I will not recant."

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In his dream of the Kingdom of God on earth, Jesus describes power and authority, not as domination, but as loving and caring service. The power of the Kingdom is not a power which has to be served, a power before which a person must bow down and cringe, BUT a power which is so unselfish, that it will serve others by dying for them.

In Mark we read:

“You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as the rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you, must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you, must be a servant of all.” (Mk 10:43-44)

In Matthew we read:

“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on others’ shoulders - but will not lift a finger to move them.” (Mt. 23:4)

On Tuesday, the Vatican informed Fr. Bourgeois that he is:

- 1) dismissed (the old term is: “defrocked”) from the priesthood that he served for 40+ years;
- 2) expelled from the Maryknoll Order - his home and community for 45 years;
- 3) excommunicated from the Catholic Church - which means that he cannot practice as a Catholic, receive Communion and the other Sacraments!

How do these penalties relate to the “Kingdom of God” upon which we are reflecting today?

How ironic that Fr. Roy Bourgeois who is compelled in conscience to publically call for dialogue and discussion concerning women’s ordination is expelled, and yet the Bishops and Cardinals who for years transferred sexually abusing priests from parish to parish, threatened victims to silence through their lawyers and brought numbers of dioceses to bankruptcy because of millions of dollars of payoffs, didn’t get even a slap on the wrist from the Vatican authorities!

My brothers and sisters, while there may be some who would say that: "Well, if you don't play by the rules - you are out;" to me it seems, that a system of government that treats their own in such an unfair and cruel and unjust way, has little in common with the Kingdom of God envisioned by Jesus Christ that we celebrate today.

Such actions fly in the face of primacy of conscience, one's right to due process and the freedom to discuss matters of Faith, which are at the heart of the best of Catholic Tradition; and, such actions are one more clear indicator that the medieval, feudalistic, patriarchal form of government in the Roman Catholic Church *is no longer serving the community* (if it ever did), *but* is destroying the community and pushing many to leave it..

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My sisters and brothers, it is my prayer and hope, that such abuses of power in our Church will move us - The People of God - to demand a new form of government that is birthed from the vision of the Second Vatican Council, and the dream of the Kingdom of God, as birthed by Jesus 2,000 years ago.

In the near future, I'm sure there will be formal opportunities for us to express our dismay at the action of Church leaders. But for now, I offer two opportunities:

- 1) In the back of our church, there is a letter expressing support and prayer for Fr. Roy, which you might like to sign;
- 2) Fr. Roy will be in Rochester on Tuesday evening, to introduce a film which addresses the issue of women's ordination - examining its whole historical context. A group from the Parish is planning to car-pool to the event and if you would like to join us, we'll be leaving the Parish Center garage area at about 3:30/3:45pm. Since we need to reserve tickets, please let Meg know or call the Parish Center.

In conclusion, I'd like to share a brief quote from Fr. Roy Bourgeois' book: *My Journey from Silence to Solidarity*:

“During the Civil Rights struggle, Dr. Martin Luther King addressed the issue of liberation. He said that whites were enslaved by their fear toward blacks, and that whites would be liberated by the Black Americans they oppressed. As a Catholic Priest, I see how our all male priesthood is being enslaved by our sexism and fear toward women in the Church. I also see how we will be liberated and made free by the women we oppress.”

Amen!