



March 2015 #3

Because we all need support as Christian peacemakers, Pax Christi MA once again offers words of encouragement to our Catholic community as it seeks to understand and implement Jesus' gospel of active, nonviolent love of all.

For Christians, Lent is the 'serious time' - the 40 days presented to us in which to reflect and repent for our personal sins. It is also the time to make connections between individual perfidy, institutionally entrenched evil, and the woundedness of the world we have helped create by "what we have done and what we have failed to do." Sometimes we despair at the enormity of the darkness, and we cry out, "Where shall we go, what shall we do, Lord?" In the acceptance of our total dependence on God, we provide space for the Spirit to guide us in the way of mercy where none is to be found.

On the second Sunday of Lent we heard the passage from Mark 9:2-10 which follows soon after Jesus, anticipating his Passion, tells his disciples that he will suffer "grievously." After leading his disciples, Peter, James and John to the mountaintop, Jesus "was transfigured before them," causing them to become confused and frightened. They are unable to fathom the meaning of the luminous Jesus appearing with Elijah and Moses. As if breaking through their fear, God's voice is heard coming from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him." All attention is drawn to Jesus, the one chosen as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. He is presented as the emanation of the Holy One, as luminous energy hearkening back to the creation of the cosmos, his being so radiant with light that it bedazzles his friends.

Comprehension of the significance of this event will only slowly evolve, even for those closest to him. But it may be that these few words from God give them pause, and begin the breakthrough to a new consciousness, since "Listen to him" affirms that God's purpose for existence resides in the person and message of Jesus. We are to become like him. And as the incarnation of Divine intent, Jesus provides the truest guide to lead us beyond our fear to become prophets of peace, missionaries of love, and reconcilers of division in a world of wanton violence. This passage represents one of the most crucial to our vocation as Christian peacemakers. There is no question that Jesus incarnated the Love called 'agape' as the instrument for overcoming and transforming evil. "Listen to him" are words spoken to the disciples long ago, and to us today always in the context of the here-and-now. Again and again we are sent back to Jesus to discern how to use Love as an energetic force in our own historical context in relation to the ubiquitous manifestations of enmity. In a booklet called "Peace, War and the Christian Conscience," Joseph J Fahey speaks of the consistency of this "spirit" of love in the gospels:

"Isolated texts from the Gospels have been used to justify killing and violence. But the spirit of the Gospels is one of peace - a peace reached through nonviolent love. With this background, it is not hard to see how early Christians concluded that: War was a denial of their hope for universal peace...the killing of enemies was incompatible with Christian love...Christian could not kill others (because) people of all nations were regarded as brothers and sisters in Christ."

Innumerable witnesses since the time of Christ have kept alive through word and witness the spirituality and means of Gospel nonviolence, leavening the world with the yeast of hope by accepting the "cost of discipleship." Some suffer martyrdom as the outcome of their witness to living the Beatitudes, either by death or scorn; some refuse to serve in the military and are persecuted; others reflect Christ in their day to day fidelity to the small ways of love; and, innumerable others keep alive the vision of peace and justice and the "Beloved Community" through the witness of direct confrontation with institutional violence. They unmask evil and call it for what it is. All must accept the pain of being on the margins .

In March we take a moment to recall the life and martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero, felled by assassins' bullets as he celebrated mass on March 24, 1980 in the chapel of the cancer hospital administered by Carmelite Sisters in El Salvador. This also was where he lived modestly. It is known that two of the assassins were part of the Salvadoran death squads, trained at the School of the Americas (now called Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), in Georgia. Romero anticipated martyrdom as a real possibility when he said, "I have frequently been threatened with death. As a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people."

Romero underwent what he called an "evolution" and a deepening of his commitment to the cause of the crucified peasants, after his elevation to Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. The murder of his closest friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, S.J., the pastor of a rural parish, was a watershed moment. Fr. Rutilio regularly denounced the government's brutality and organized the peasants in resistance to their oppression at the hands of the wealthy landowners. As the

Archbishop embraced his identity with the poor, he became a prophetic “voice for the voiceless” who, he believed, were living icons of Jesus. From a conservative, pious representative of the institutional church, he grew increasingly outspoken in his critique of a brutal government that persecuted the poor, and “disappeared,” tortured and murdered both clergy and lay. His growing awareness of structural violence and the concentrated wealth of a dozen ruling families provided a clearer perspective on the enormous suffering of his people. He also linked what was happening in his own country to the US funding and training for the Salvadoran military, a stance opposed by Vatican authorities. In weekly radio broadcasts and homilies he fearlessly condemned all violence, whether perpetrated by the government and military, or by rebel groups. In a homily the day before his murder, which reached the homes of the poor by radio broadcast, he said, “Brothers, you came from your own people. You are killing your own brothers.”

Any human order to kill must be subordinated to the law of God, which says, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you obeyed your consciences rather than sinful orders. The church cannot remain silent before such an abomination...In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cry rises to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you: stop the repression.”

Archbishop Romero’s life and death reflect an openness to discovering the loving and merciful God who lives in the midst of historical events, and requires that all of us engage with the evil and turmoil of our day, especially as it affects those who suffer under the burden of relievable human misery.

Recently, Pax Christi MA, in conjunction with the nonviolent Catholic community, “Agape,” delivered a letter to Sean Cardinal O’Malley in reference to the death penalty, with a focus on the federal trial in Boston of accused Marathon bomber, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The possibility of imposing the death penalty in this case is real, and so provides an opportunity for Cardinal O’Malley to reiterate the condemnation of its use for Dzhokhar, and for all those who face execution in the US. It also provides the opening to pastorally educate and counsel the faithful on the necessity of mercy as an essential aspect of Christian faithfulness. We fully acknowledge and grieve the tragic deaths and ongoing suffering visited upon innocence that beautiful Spring day in 2013, but we rely on the truth that Jesus suffered the cross of crucifixion. However, if we cannot imagine Jesus as Executioner, neither can his followers cooperate with executions. 32 states continue to retain the death penalty as a legitimate and just means of dealing with murderers. This prods us to reflect on “Blessed are the Merciful,” and to ask “Why do we kill those who kill to prove that killing is wrong?” A broader statement addressed to the entire Christian Community has been created and is now circulating throughout the country. It can be found on the paxchristiusa.org website as well. We believe this is a propitious time to draw attention to the barbaric practice of state-sanctioned killing, done in our name. Recently, the “National Catholic Reporter,” “National Catholic Register,” America magazine and “Our Sunday Visitor” posted a joint editorial calling for the “end to capital punishment.” We are not alone.

In many ways, the life of nonviolent fidelity starts the small stuff of our daily lives when we pray to discern how we should bring love and reconciliation to the issues that confront us. Nancy Small, in “Seizing the Nonviolent Moments - Reflections on the Spirituality of

Nonviolence Through the Lens of Scripture,” offers us a beautiful guide to the power and beauty inherent in living non-harmful, loving lives. She says, “Nonviolence is a force that seeks not to harm but to heal, not to break down but to build up. It seeks to transform our world without trouncing opposing forces. It reaches beyond confusion and chaos toward answers that seem to lie far beyond our understanding. It transcends love limited by myriad conditions toward a love that knows no bounds. The spirituality of nonviolence erases lines drawn in the sand and traces the contours of common ground...Each nonviolent action we take leaves its imprint and invites others to follow in our footsteps...”

One of the Desert Fathers, Abba Poeman also spoke of the need to begin the journey through internal conversion. He said: “Passions work in four stages - first in the heart; secondly, on the face; thirdly, in words; and fourthly, it is always essential not to render evil for evil in deeds. If you can purify your heart, passion will not reveal itself in your expression; but if it reaches your face, then take care not to speak; and if you do speak, at least cut the conversation short in case you do render evil for evil.”

Together, let us adopt Pax Christi’s counsel to “Pray, Study, and Act” as we work to be agents of Mercy and Love, Peace and Justice.

Study and Action

1. For copies of the “Statement to Abolish the Death Penalty...” go to paxchristiusa.org; to sign the statement, contact: patferrone@rcn.com or peace@agapecommunity.org
2. Seizing the Nonviolent Moments - Reflections on the Spirituality of Nonviolence Through the Lens of Scripture” by Nancy Small is available from www.wipfandstock.com or amazon.com
3. NANCY SMALL will lead the Spring Retreat of Pax Christi MA on APRIL 11, 2015 at Elms College in Chicopee MA. For a flyer, contact patferrone@rcn.com or paxchristima@gmail.com. Everyone is welcome.
4. Excerpt by Abba Poeman is from “In the Heart of the Desert” by John Chryssavagis, published by “World Wisdom.”
5. Visit the Pax Christi USA website, paxchristiusa.org for updates on ways to be involved in their work. Better yet, become a member of the national organization, automatically enrolling you as a member of Pax Christi MA
6. Follow the work of the School of the Americas Watch, which reports on US Foreign Policy in the Americas, and investigates and protests the continued existence of the SOA/WHINSEC at Fort Benning, GA, used for the training of Latin American military personnel: saw.org
7. Electronic copies of “Peace Pages” can be obtained through Pat Ferrone: patferrone@rcn.com

Pray for peace, be peace, make peace. Pax Christi MA

Our Mission

Pax Christi strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. **Pax Christi USA** rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation. There are 14 local **Pax Christi** groups in **Massachusetts**. We invite you to join one of these or start a local group in your area.