

Mass for Life, January 20, 2020  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
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He was born on January 15, 1929. He was killed on April 4, 1968. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:  
Man of faith. Pastor. Preacher of the Gospel. Proclaimer of Justice. Leader of non-violent  
protests. The voice of conscience against the sins of racism.

Most of us have heard of his famous speech: “I have a dream.”

But to reduce Dr King to one speech is like trying to reduce Jesus to one parable. All of King’s  
words, reflected in his actions, continue to teach and challenge us.

True. Standing in front of the Lincoln memorial, Dr. King did say, “I have a dream...”

Tonight I want to recall some of his other famous quotes. Such as:

“The person who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as those who help to perpetrate  
it. If you who accept evil without protesting against it, you’re really cooperating with it.”

“The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful  
tomorrows”

“Never, never be afraid to do what’s right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at  
stake. Society’s punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we  
look the other way.”

After his assassination, millions of people mourned. Investigations and trials took place. Sadly, it  
became clear that there were people who had convinced themselves that Dr. King was too much  
of a trouble-maker, too much of a leader for change. They were convinced that his death would  
be the solution to their problem.

Throughout human history, there have been human beings who convince themselves that death is  
the solution to our problems. That destructive way of thinking becomes even more frightening  
when people believe that God *desires* the death of someone else or something else in order for us  
to thrive.

Wherever that lie is told, we must learn to listen to God’s truth with fresh ears. Tonight, we

listened to the very first sentences of the Bible – the narrative of God’s work “in the beginning.”

And what do we hear? We hear that God created everything, and everything was very good. Every creature. Every inch of creation. It is very good.

Every human being is created in God’s image. Every human being bears the divine image. When we remember that, we treat one another with justice and mercy. Life is precious.

According to the Book of Genesis, Death enters the human experience because of our willingness to ignore God and live without him (we call that “sin”). God, nevertheless, keeps saying “yes” to life, and “no” to death.

God’s ultimate victory over Death happens through the child who was knit together in the womb of Mary of Nazareth. And it was another child in the womb, John the Baptist, who leaps for joy because the savior is near.

Mary and Elizabeth are filled with the Spirit, and become prophetic proclaimers of God’s justice, God’s love for life, God’s will to transform this world.

Mary, inspired by the Spirit, sings a melody praising all that God is accomplishing through the child in her womb. What does she sing?

God has “blessed those who serve him.”

God has “shown mercy to the meek, and cast down the arrogant.”

God will “fill the hungry, and send the wealth away.”

God will “lift up the lowly.”

Our God is about life, compassion, generosity, and justice.

When Jesus turned 33 years old, there were those in ancient Israel who determined that he was so much of a trouble-maker, so much of a ‘leader for change,’ that they came to a conclusion. The conclusion was this: the death of Jesus would solve their problem.

But God rejects such falsehoods. Which is why, on Easter Sunday, the tomb is empty, and the stone rolled back. The resurrection of Christ is God’s “yes” to life and “no” to death.

God’s truth is clear. But so often, we lose sight of that clarity. And still, with sad regularity, we ask Death to solve our problems.

So...

+ someone with a grudge decides that a neighbor must die. Death is the solution to my problem!

+ In the middle east, where ancient conflicts continue to rage, angry people with expensive weapons keep killing others. Death is the solution to my problem!

+ In England last year, hospital staff members were accused of carrying out a massive euthanasia scheme. Over 450 patients were put to death by the doctors and nurses there. Death is the solution!

+ In the halls of congress, angry voices denounce immigration policies which separate children from parents. Our bishops have raised their voices about this policy as well.

+ Since abortion was legalized in 1973, over 50 million American children have lost their lives through abortion. Do the lives of those children not require adamant defense? Or, for those 50 million, is death really the solution?

+ Gun violence that terrorizes city streets. Domestic violence which creates horror at home. Conservative voices calling for expanded use of the death penalty. Liberal voices calling for the legalization of euthanasia and suicide.

Underneath it all is a lie – the lie which says, “death is the solution to our problems.”

God’s people must become bold in telling God’s truth.

We Catholics could play a constructive role in a time of otherwise angry rhetoric. Why? Because, if we are *truly* being Catholic, we will not fit in to *any* convenient political category. We believe that God is about life. We believe that life must be respected and protected at every stage and in every circumstance.

To be a Catholic means that I passionately proclaim the value of the life of every child in the womb. And I also proclaim the dignity of every child outside the womb, including the immigrant child, the poor child, the child whose mom is an addict.

To be a Catholic means that I passionately proclaim the value of every human life: the elderly person in hospice care, the uninsured person who needs quality health care, the prisoner facing the death penalty.

To be a Catholic means that I passionately proclaim that caring for creation is caring for life. That helping a poor neighbor is not optional – it is who we are as Catholics. And our Catholic

theology also teaches us that work – honest, hard work – is one of the key aspects to a life of meaning and purpose for women and men.

Political voices want you to slap a label upon your shirt so that everyone knows who you are: *Conservative. Liberal. CNN. Fox.*

But *you are not a label*. You are a *child of God*, created in God's image. You know that life's complex questions usually don't find their answers in a 30 second political commercial. You know that life's complex questions begin to find their answers in the person named Jesus Christ – and his Gospel.

As we engage in both conversation and action, we must remember that Jesus called his disciples to "speak the truth in love." Always the *truth*. Always in *love*.

Truth without love becomes a brutal weapon. Love without truth becomes a sentimental lie.

We are called to become the people who, in word *and* deed, lovingly, consistently show that all of God's creation, and all of God's creatures, are precious in God's sight.

And if we ever grow weary of that hard work, we can remember the words of Dr. King, who said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

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