

Reflections delivered January 19th and 20th, 2008

St. Therese Parish, by Judith Hightower

Preamble: When I was asked to give the Reflection in honor of Dr. King this week-end I was happy to do so but I've never talked about Dr. King for less than twenty or thirty minutes. I laughed when I was told I had ten minutes. Then our lay presider reminded me that the purpose of the Reflection is to share the good news. Well the good news is that God does not give up hope on us. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were given only one rule and they broke it. They were turned out of the garden and after a number of years; God took pity upon us and sent us Moses with Ten Commandments to help us understand what we need to do. We still didn't get it and He sent Jesus to help us with two commandments. Only two and we still don't get it! So God continues to send us prophets and He sent us Dr. King who preached service and love.

I marvel at how perfect our readings in Ordinary Time reflect the life of Dr. Martin Luther King during this time we remember him. He is a model to us of service and apostleship and of one filled with the Holy Spirit. as reflected in our readings.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an ordinary person like you and I but who had an extraordinary faith from which he drew great courage that filled him with an abundance of love for all human beings. He was a man who confessed to subjecting himself to endless self-analysis, questioning and soul searching to be certain he was fulfilling the true meaning of his work and maintaining his sense of purpose. He was a man of conscience who strived to live a committed life. Dr. King did not choose to be a leader in the civil rights movement but accepted the task thrust upon him, unable to refuse a call to fulfill what he viewed as his God given ministry – to make the world a better place to live for all people. He studied the social gospels and was most concerned with the three dimensions of a complete life: love of self, love of neighbor and love of God. He was a man of thought, a man of action and a man of prayer. Dr. King's vision is a global one. He adopted the mantle of an extremist, an extremist in the brotherhood of humanity. He tells us that his commitment to minister to the world as neighbor calls him to speak for the weak, for the voiceless. He calls us all to be extremists in the brotherhood of humanity and asks us, what kind of extremist will we be? Will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the cause of justice? He also called for strong leadership and eschewed what he calls quasi-liberals who look at all sides with such objective analysis that they fail to be committed. He called

them lukewarm and you know what Jesus said about that: to be spat from the mouth. As a student and apostle of Jesus Christ, like Paul in our second reading, Dr. King's dream is a vision of the world where all people are seen as human beings with equal access to education, employment, health care and peace regardless of race, religion or class. Dr. King called us to rise up and take leadership without fear for our God is interested in freeing the whole human race. Like Jesus Christ and other apostles, Dr. King was martyred. Dr. King was martyred because he stepped beyond the issue of race and civil rights in this country. He dared to challenge the military-industrial complex, the global economics of world banking and agribusiness. He dared to challenge the privileged class, not just nationally but globally. At the time of his murder in Memphis, Dr. King advocated a guaranteed minimum wage. He called for an end to war he described as the most unjust war in history (in his time). He died because he had the nerve to call for an international economic boycott. As a servant through whom God shows his glory, and, as an apostle, Dr. King called us to love. In his writings, speeches and interviews, he repeatedly defined as not love of friends, not romantic love but agape. That understanding, creative, redemptive good will to all people, overflowing love that seeks nothing in return. Agape is the love seeking to create and preserve community and willing to go to any length to restore community, even death. This love recognizes that all life is interrelated. There are two scriptures Dr. King most often referenced to help us understand this service and love, the parable of The Good Samaritan and the story of James and John. In his Drum Major speech, Dr. King brings these two stories together.

Dr. King describes the drum major instinct as the desire to be first. It is the quest for recognition, desire for attention, for distinction, and a desire to be praised. It is the desire to be great. Dr. King warns us that this instinct is dangerous if it is not harnessed. It can lead us to feel better than others, to feel that we are first. It leads to all kinds of prejudice and separates us from each other. This is the instinct that James and John exhibited. You know the story and what Jesus said: "He who would be the greatest among you shall be your servant." Dr. King teaches that we come not to be served, but to serve. He also tells us not to give up your drum major instinct for: " It is good if you use it right. Feel the need to be important, feel the need to be first

but be first in love, first in moral excellence, first in generosity. Everybody can be great because everybody can serve. All you need is a soul generated by love.” You know the story of the Good Samaritan and recently Father Okumu spoke to us about it and how important it is to understand the treachery of the Blood Pass and the relationship between the stranger and the Samaritan. It’s important to understand this context when Dr. King asks us to “develop a dangerous unselfishness” like the Good Samaritan. He said: “The ultimate measure of a human being is not where one stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where one stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk their position, their prestige and even their life for the welfare of others.”

Dr. King risked and gave his life to move us toward a just world. He asks that we consider the same.

The life and death of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. challenges us not to be silent in the face of injustice; to accept the challenge to be an extremist in brotherhood of humanity and great in service. According to Dr. King, among the many issues facing those of us who choose to serve as apostles of Jesus Christ, “...a final problem that humankind must solve in order to survive in the world house that we have inherited is finding an alternative to war and human destruction.”

In his last Sunday sermon in March of 1968, Dr. King asked us not to sleep through the revolution. In his words:

“One of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses.” So, remain vigilant for the call to serve, “Use your imagination with a penetrating study of the world drift” and when you are called upon to take a stand, remember his words: “Cowardice asks the question is it expedient, expedience asks is it politic and vanity asks if it is popular. Conscience asks the question, is it right? For all of us there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic nor popular, but we must do it because conscience tells us it is right.”

We don’t need to search for the words to talk about Dr. King because he left us words to use to remember him. He asked that we “**mention that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others, he tried to love somebody.**” He

wanted us to **“say the he tried to be right on the war question, that he did try to feed the hungry, to clothe those who are naked, to visit those who are in prison.”** He wanted us to **“say that he did try to love and serve humanity.”** Remember these words? **“But I just want to leave a committed life behind. Say that I was a drum major for peace. Say that day that I was a drum major for justice.”**

Clearly, like Isaiah in our first reading, Dr. King was formed in as God’s own servant in the womb, through whom God has shown his glory and made him a light to the nations.

I ask you to take a few minutes in silence to listen to your inner spirit and contemplate what it means to serve God as an apostle of Jesus Christ, to know and harness your drum major instinct; to find where you are called in your life to be an extremist in the brotherhood of humanity; to develop a dangerous unselfishness; to live a committed life; to be great in service and to find the Dr. King in you.

For surely, like John the Baptist’s testimony in today’s gospel, God sent his spirit to rest upon Martin Luther King Jr. and said **‘this is my son in whom I am well pleased.’** And THAT is Good News! Amen!