

Readings

Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26
Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20
1 John 4:11-16
John 17:11b-19

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“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.” (John 4:11)

The Seventh Sunday of Easter contains the prayer of hope that Christ proclaims on Good Friday: “Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.” How do we imitate Christ’s Good Friday prayer? Such a prayer is the pathway to Peace that was given to disillusioned disciples when he breathed on them the gift of mercy. “Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Have we received and implemented the disciples’ gift to forgive, to love one another? Or do we choose to live in the darkness of anger which often migrates to hatred?

During the Easter season, a lit candle is placed in the church’s sanctuary, a flame proclaiming that Christ’s Resurrection overcomes the darkness; the darkness created by humanity’s hatred which annihilates the gift of another’s spirit.

The absence of a merciful spirit reveals a primal cry that is planted with birth, the seed of anger. A child knows the power of the seed when their cry is out of control, a tantrum. As adults we have known anger, even a justified anger. Yet even our justified anger can mutate into hatred. Hatred is a force equal to a hurricane that shatters families and neighbors, at times whole communities and nations. Such a force imprisons the heart and spirit.

How do victims of violence and their families live with anger? It is rare to hear a story of violence where mercy become the ointment for healing. Even rarer is there a story of mercy when a murder has been committed, a capital crime.

There is a story when the Easter light overcomes darkness, it happened in Minneapolis and was reported to me by the Visitation Sisters, who live in the Hood of Minneapolis. It is the story of Mary Johnson, mother of a murdered teenager and a woman of faith, who lived in a cancerous darkness with the loss of her son. Darkness did not paralyze her from the everyday ritual of life, especially her quiet time with God. Her prayer would eventually unshackle the darkness of her son's violent death as the voice of her prayer invited her to visit the one who killed her son. The invitation provoked an anxiety, leading to a natural reluctance, a fear. The invitation did not go silent nor did Mary's reluctance.

Like most biblical wrestling matches, the winner is the one who discovers a freedom to say "Yes." What was Peter's response to the Lord when he was asked, "Do you love me?" Three "yeses" to three denials.

Mary Johnson discovered the same freedom, although an anxious freedom.

Yes, with the anxiety of an awaiting parent sitting in the prison visitor's room, Mary's spirit embraced the murderer, which eventually allowed Mary to physically embrace the recovering criminal. Both took a risk, a healing engagement. When the doors of the prison were opened, no longer a young man, he moved into the apartment next to Mary. Reconciliation, mercy, love was revealed in a way that neither had known before.

The Easter Light overcame the darkness allowing God's love to be embraced.

"Peace be with you" is Christ's greeting to all in the upper room. A room that is found in our hearts, may it too know the Easter greeting of peace.