

Encouragement Encouragement

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Non-violence – Peace of the Spirit

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Of late we hear, we hear much about retribution, retaliation and even violence as a means prevention of attack rather than only self-defence. There is no doubt that we live at a time when overt violence is a daily message; gun warfare, gang violence, the killing of innocent people, murder and war. It is hard sometimes to stand back and look at what the Gospel teaches us about such activity and what is required of us as Christians. We have teaching upon teaching about the need to love our neighbour, value them and do good to those persecute, hate, or even just irritate us, even at the cost of our well-being or life. The Beatitudes serve to remind us of this and that if this happens we are Blessed ('Blessed are you when men hate or persecute you because of Me'). All these reactions however are seen as weaknesses and irrelevant as the world is intent on promoting dominance and strength and not peace and hospitality of the heart and tolerance.

Yet we have many examples of great movements for peace and justice that have achieved much through non-violent means and changed the course of History. This year we remember Martin Luther King the great activist for Racial Justice. Fifty years ago, he placed himself at the head of a small body of people who just wanted to walk across the bridge linking white and black communities in a little place called Selma. U.S.A. Men women and children walked quietly across the bridge to be faced with armed soldiers ready to fire if they did not turn back. Many were killed. They repeated this silent and prayerful protest until the law was altered and they were allowed to pass unhindered. Not one of his group raised an arm – not one uttered insults – but the Spirit of God was with them. The Lord defended them and all was changed. Years later even more was achieved.

On another continent, in Russia, another man was making another stand for the right to worship and evangelise. Interestingly, when the two countries were at odds. Dimitri was a father of three and living in an isolated village during the Stalinist Regime when prayer meetings and gatherings were banned. He was very concerned about the lack of spiritual teaching for his children and thought himself safe far away from any town... So he set about telling his children Bible stories and lessons. Soon



the villagers heard what he was doing and started to come as well. At first just a few then twenty, fifty and finally about seventy-five people squeezed into his tiny house. Then followed the usual and dreaded knock on the door... Army officers burst into his little house and started to beat him. A little old lady stood up and pointing a finger at the soldier said. 'You will not defeat him and as you have raised a finger against this man of God, and so you will not live'. Two days later the soldier dropped dead and in fury the soldiers came and arrested Dimitri. He was tried and sentenced to seventeen years of hard labour. Not daunted, he continued his prayer regime and prayed night and day in a cell that was hardly bigger than his outstretched arms. Over the years he was beaten, tortured but did not give in. One night after years of this treatment

he was told that his wife and children had been killed. He wavered and was about to 'give in', feeling totally broken. But the Lord saw and listened to him, and suddenly he heard his wife and children praying for him. He knew then that they were alive. He rallied round and the next day continued his prayer and hymn singing. This infuriated the wardens and guards and he was to be executed. They marched him passed all the other prisoners, but an amazing thing happened. One by one the others stood up and sang the hymn that they had heard him pray/singing... they continued singing as he was placed in front of the firing line. Many of the prisoners were not Christian but only political prisoners. The sheer power of the voices and prayer halted the soldiers and disarmed them. When the order to shoot was given they could not fire. He was led back to the cell and shortly afterward returned to his home. The numbers in his little assembly had grown.

In both instances the Power of God was acting in the silent non-violent witness of the men (and women) involved. 'Great things happen when believers pray'. (James 5:16 'The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effect')

It is interesting to note that we seem to have forgotten this. There is indeed power in prayer and faith can move mountains and indeed change history. In an age where money is power, control, where positive action is seen as vital, we have forgotten this. Time and time again great

"It is not easy to show this world today that peace is possible, but in the name of Jesus we can show, by our testimony, that peace is possible! It is possible if we are at peace with one another" Pope Francis, Pentecost 2017

things happen through the power of prayer. Dorothy Day, an activist herself, realised this in her marches against the use of nuclear weapons and for racial justice. Incredible miracles happen in seemingly impossible or impassable situation. In Oct.1989 at the Eucharistic Congress in Korea, one night I witnessed over 15,000 men women and children praying all night at exposition for the tumbling of the Berlin wall and a unity in Europe. Within a week of returning we were blessed with a sudden and totally unexpected fall of that wall and a liberation of many Eastern and Central European countries achieved non- violently. They asked us to pray for the unification of their divided land and a fall of their 'wall'. Can we respond non-violently?

There is a hymn sung by young African women which has a line which always hits me... 'We are soldiers of Jesus Christ and we do battle on our knees!'

Are we not all soldiers of Jesus? The descent of the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles and Disciples great power and gifts to be used. We too receive these gifts both at Baptism but again in Confirmation. Should we not use them to full advantage... Jesus appearing to the Disciples did not whip them up to a frenzy of action but greeted them with the words 'Peace be with you' A peaceful heart will never incite violence, hatred or enmity. There are moments when every peaceful means fails for it requires both opposing parties to be at peace but violence should always be a last resort and only after much reflection and prayer... there is a saying which states that 'violence breeds violence'.

There is no doubt that we have a duty to uphold justice for all people, help the oppressed and help those in need of protection – but we must choose our 'weapons' carefully. Jesus, outraged at the selling, barter and cheating done by the money lenders in the temple compound showed His displeasure in an outwardly aggressive way. But He overturned tables and evicted the participants. He attacked the means and not the people themselves. While making his position clear... so too when they came to arrest him in Gethsemane He put back Malcus's ear and did not permit Peter a violent response or even the purchase of weapons. They failed to understand that the sword of the Spirit is mightier.

In conclusion I quote the words of a *Special Pastor...*
"By and large we human beings are non-violent. We are expected to live and behave non-violently according to our nature. All through the Passion Jesus was non- violent. According to the prophecy of Isaiah 'I gave my back to the smiters!' At the last supper Jesus was eating with those who betrayed Him, Judas by kissing Him and the others except John by running away even when He was arrested. This is how he handled opposition, violence and betrayal.

Down the ages many of His great followers imitated His non- violence in the stages for freedom – Justice. Non- violence is not just accepting violence to oneself. It is something more positive, it is the power of the Godhead within us. Even a small fraction of it works wonders in us".



Halina Holman

Pope Francis

"For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the 'Christian revolution'. The Gospel command to love your enemies is rightly considered the 'Magna Carta' of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil... but in responding to evil with good, and thereby breaking the chain of injustice".

Rome 2018



"You are being built together so as to become a place in which God dwells by His Spirit." (Eph 2:22.)

Come Holy Spirit,

Bind us together!

Bind broken hearts with your love

Bind broken Spirits with your consolation.

Bind split families with your solace.

Bind broken communities with your healing.

Bind divided nations with your peace.

Bind Christian Churches with your unity.

Bind our First and Third world in common solidarity.

Amen.

Fr. Patrick Sayles

(From 'Lord In flame Our Hearts With Your Spirit'.)

Feast Days in May.

1st St. Joseph the Worker

2nd St Athanasius

3rd Ss. Philip and James Apostles

4th English Martyrs

6th Sixth Sunday of Easter

10th Ascension Thursday (Scotland)

13th Ascension Day (England, Wales and Ireland)

14th St. Matthias, Apostle.

20th Pentecost Sunday

21st Mary, Mother of the Church. (New Universal Feast)

25th St. Bede

27th (Sunday) Holy Trinity

31st Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary