

## Reflection – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Jan 24, 2021

What a rich week! We live during a pandemic and in the stress of the ‘almost but not yet’ of the vaccine rollout, I’d like to share some events that brought me hope this week. Perhaps they will nurture you. Perhaps you have other experiences of the week that helped you be as well as you can be.

Today ends the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We are called to be one in Christ– Jesus prayed “that they may be one as We are one”. Jn 17:21

Our neighbors in the US celebrated Martin Luther King Day. Dr King said, “Take the first step. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

Our parish offered us an opportunity to begin to reflect together on Fratelli Tutti, wherein Pope Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters, to work for the common good. Thanks, Eleanor Rabnett, for creating this time and being bold enough to lead us. Check the parish website if you would like to register. I think this document is a call to repentance and growth. It surely echoes some of Jonah’s exhortations we heard in our first reading.

Amanda Gorman gave us the poem *The Hill We Climb* at the inauguration ceremony of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

In the first reading, Jonah responded to God’s call to go to Nineveh and told the people they had only 40 days before “Nineveh shall be overthrown”. The people fasted and “turned from their evil ways”. God “changed his mind” and did not destroy them. If we read a bit further in the book of Jonah, we see that Jonah is not pleased with God’s compassion toward the Ninevites. This story has lots of twists and turns. You may recall that Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. He tried to run away and spent 3 nights in the belly of whale after trying to flee from God’s command to go and warn the people of God’s impending wrath. And, once the people repented, Jonah was not pleased. In the next chapter, Jonah is angry with God for saving the Ninevites. He struggles with God’s compassion.

On the evening of Jan 19th, the first action the president elect and vice-president elect of the US was to hold a memorial in front of the Lincoln monument honoring

the 400,000 people in the US who have died of Covid-19 during this pandemic. It was the first national service for those who have died. Then President elect Biden told us that it is hard to remember, it is painful to remember and yet we must remember if we are to heal.

Ordinary, wounded people do extraordinary things that bring unity and healing. Martin Luther King, Jr said, "I have decided to stick with love. **Hate** is too great a **burden** to bear."

We've probably got personal stories of friends and family who have done extraordinary things to create healing; perhaps you have chosen love to heal painful situations.

I'd like to share a bit of a friend's story. Ray's dad was an alcoholic. When he drank he got mean. As the children grew he began to hurt them when he was drunk, especially the boys. Ray's mom kicked him out of the family home to protect the children. She sold the home and moved to a much smaller place. His dad lived on the streets and in shelters. Ray talks about sharing a room with 5 brothers while his mom and sisters shared a room. They didn't have much money or much space. Ray's mom raised all 7 kids while she worked shifts as an RN in a local hospital. He says they didn't have much but they had one another. Ray's mom kept in touch with his dad and with his dad's family. When the kids were all out of the house and his mom retired, Ray's mom learned that his dad was in hospital. All his years of hard living and hard drinking had ruined his body and he was dying. Ray's mom welcomed her former husband and father of their 7 children home to die. She cared for him in the same 2-bedroom house where she'd raised their 7 kids. The 5 months he lived 'at home' gave his kids and grandkids time to be with him, to know the man who was their father and grandfather. Ray said it took time for him and his adult siblings to trust that this broken man was not a threat to their mom or to them. They began to love him. By the time he died, the family seemed whole again.

God's light and love nurtures our capacity to create unity and healing. We are invited and called to reflect on our actions and how those actions create good for all – for other people, other beings, and for the planet. To do this is not to put on

blindness. We need to remember, and it will be painful. God calls us to love one another, to be compassionate.

Like Jonah, sometimes we are angry. We have been hurt by others, by what was done or not done. It is ok to be angry. And yet Jesus prayed for us. He prayed that “that **they may be one as We are one**”. John 17:20

Pope Francis reminds us of this in Fratelli Tutti as he exhorts us to work for the common good. I don't think we can dismiss this call, this invitation to unity. If we accept it, it will change the way we live with one another. Will it be easy? No. It won't be easy. It will be messy. We will have difficult conversations. We will hurt one another by our actions and our inactions. Yet the call remains.

To answer this call we must live in hope. Pope Francis issues this invitation so wonderfully in Fratelli Tutti:

“I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope “speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”. “Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope.” Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis

Amanda Gorman told the world at Wednesday's inauguration “there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it”.

Thank you for joining me. I pray you live with courage, hope and light this coming week. God bless you.

**Donna Rietschlin**

**Jan 21, 2021**

**St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa**