

July 2, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

Last Sunday, within the context of my homily, I had quoted Robert Kennedy's address to an inner-city African American community in the Broadway neighborhood of Indianapolis, Indiana, the night that Dr. Martin Luther King had been killed. This was to be a routine campaign speech, but circumstances determined otherwise. Some of his staff were uncertain about his following through with his plans, but he disagreed. He felt it was more urgent than ever that he address them.

The speech he gave that night was quite different than what he had intended to deliver. After announcing Dr. King's death, he then addressed the crowd. His words are as significant today as they were in that moment. They were brief but filled with compassion and inspiring.

"Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort. In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in.

For those of you who are black - considering the evidence evidently is that there were white people who were responsible - you can be filled with bitterness, and with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in great polarization - black people amongst black, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another.

Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand compassion and love.

For those of you who are black and are tempted to be filled with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed - but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States. We have to make an effort to understand, to get beyond or go beyond these rather difficult times.

A favorite poem, my favorite poet - was Aeschylus. He once wrote: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

What we need in the United States is not division. What we need in the United States is not hatred. What we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country; - whether they be white or they be black.

We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times We've had difficult times in the past. We will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence. It is not the end of lawlessness; it is not the end of disorder...

Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and to make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people. Thank you very much."

God Bless!  
Father Joe