



Holy Thursday

April 21, 2011

To: La Obra de San Martin  
La Comunidad de los Martines

Holy Week. The week of the Passion of Christ. Holy week is that mystical movement where the suffering and passion of the divinity meet the human. While we celebrate the Mass, like Jesus we pray and ask that this cup of betrayal be taken from us. While we celebrate the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we become nervous as we see the principalities and powers of evil rise their ugly heads and begin to destroy. While we appreciate the solidarity of those around us, we now fear the isolation we experience and wonder what happened. Like the Apostles, as the story unfolds, we each have our own response as we try to make sense out of betrayal, suffering and continued pain. While we joyfully celebrate the vision we have for church, we are painfully aware of how much we lost this year and how church has retreated and regressed, leaving the poor and oppressed once again behind with no pastoral services.

Your work this year to support the poor and marginalized in San Bernardino has been exemplary. Hope was shared. New vision was promoted. There was struggle. There was defeat. There is brokenness. Yet your faith – though tempered – is strong and still keeps you at the service of “the other.” I thank you for your faith. As I have been in touch with each of you, each of you lives out this new moment of church in different ways. For some, it has meant focusing and just working on survival given unjust dismissals and economic repression. For others, it has meant returning to parishes that are less than satisfactory but are there. For others, it has been to live the pain of betrayal and abandonment.

Yet this Holy Week we connect spiritually yet again. It is not so easy to just wash our hands and walk away from a project, a project that we know had the will of God at its core and the service of God’s poor people at its center.



This past weekend, as we were preparing for the celebration of the Passion Sunday, five murders occurred in the San Bernardino/Colton area. Five young people. Two of them were stabbed and killed as they slept. One of those killed while at rest was +Dimitri Michael Ross+. He was 25 years old. 6´, 6" he was a tall, buff African American youth. He was a student.

I met +Michael+ when he was 11. I used to hold him and comfort him as he worked through the trauma of being homeless, of taking care of a mother who was barely able to take care of herself let along +Michael+ and his sister. The community of faith provided for +Michael+ and his family. Clothing, tutoring, food, a little pocket money, a way to walk that was drug free. The non-profit sector worked together pool resources. Nadine Evans, a teacher in a school for homeless youth, made sure that +Michael+ and Dhani had a safe place to be after school, with food and tutoring help. Ms. White a counselor at +Michael's+ middle school knew and understood the home challenges facing +Michael+ and his sister. She did not judge. She did not intervene negatively to disrupt or enhance brokenness. She found ways that helped +Michael+ and Dhani grow.

While we hugged, +Michael+ also had great anger he needed to express. Because of his size and depth of his voice, many people in the "system" were afraid of him. We stood eye to eye on many occasions yelling the other down. I usually won. And he, now looking down at me, would hug me and just say "thanks, PK. I love you." And so the hugs for thugs program was born and +Michael+ was soon teaching the thugs around him to hug another thug. Boys learning how to express affection for other boys. +Michael+ felt at home in his church, embracing the community of faith that had embraced him.

We enter the week of Betrayal, of Passion, of Death. +Michael+ has been served well by the non-profit sector. The dangers are now behind him. He has grown up. He is a man, with a job and studying a career. He is a success story.

But there are three factors, three other institutions which stand on the edge of the treatment plan in motion. The City of San Bernardino, the City of San Bernardino Police Department and the church still are tied to death brought about by Herod, the Feast of the



Holy Innocents. With military solutions for human problems, the city and the police department failed in keeping +Michael+ protected and alive. The church, now in control of the project that saved +Michael+ was unable to mourn his loss. Mostly like the racist Bishop who has locked +Michael+ and his friends in the street are not even aware of +Michael+, his past, his significance. One more Black youth. What did he do? He must have done something. People just don't get murdered as they sleep. And so there is no mourning space. There is no space for thugs to give hugs. The bishop is not providing pastoral services for a community in Diaspora. The remnant has no upper room to prepare the Passover.

Unless they sleep in San Bernardino. Rather than keep open Lutheran spaces for youth growth, the city is in the hands of Lutherans – City Attorney, Supervisors, City Council persons, new boards of directors – who would wash their hands like Pilot of the death around them.

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Tonight you will join with people of faith around the world creating communities of faith that will risk betrayal and death. You will drink from the cup. You will resist where it wants to take you. You will remember +Michael+ and others. And your faith will be made stronger as you commit yourself to the Body of Christ, its divinity and its humanity, its



suffering and betrayal, knowing that it will be resurrected in ways we cannot even yet begin to imagine.

From the blood of the martyrs, the seeds of the church are planted. From the sweat and blood you have given this past year, new seeds are beginning to grow. People like +Michael+ have their human fibers now woven into the city of San Bernardino and cannot be so easily extracted and denied.

Holy Week. Maundy Thursday, 2011. May the blood of the lamb fill your soul with new visions for the church. May your experience of betrayal and solidarity bring you to new levels in your own understanding of church, future and hope. May that be left behind which needs to be left behind. May corrupt powers and the ways of simple men, the dirty hands of today's Pontius Pilates, not be overwhelming but simply statements of sin being overcome. Overcome it will be. Easter is not far behind!

May these highest of holy days fill your soul with new light and new vision. May the light from Pascal Candle burning the darkness at the Pascal Vigil away guide you into new opportunities for being God's church, for being in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

Know that the Power of Life is more powerful than the power of Death. Communities of faith will continue. Betrayal and crucifixion will continue. New life and transformed lives will continue. The Power of the Eucharist is affirmed. New opportunities for being the church await us.

I am confident that we remain united around the Cup, the cup we resist and the cup we long for. May our strength and commitments to building a new world be reaffirmed this Easter Season as we prepare for New Life Together.

The Rev. David John Kalke  
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