

Bread to Dogs, Bread of God?

My dear friends, I bring you greetings from the faithful who gathered yesterday at St Paul's Cathedral, on the Boston Common, the oldest park in these United States of America. Bishop Alan Gates asked my son David about you and me, during a service of prayers for peace. And thank God there was peace in Boston yesterday as more than 40,000 gathered to provide a visible sign that hate has no place in the City of Boston. What a relief that is.



As for the President, he has done for us one thing that no one else has been able to do. He has forced us into that exquisitely uncomfortable place where we must talk about issues such as Racism. I've been to dozens of conferences, there have been thousands of sermons on Racism, but this one man has done something that no one else has been able to do. He has put us all on the spot as to where we stand. We are all forced to look into the mirror of our own souls and ask; "Who are we?"



I have spent a lifetime working against racism. I began my ministry in Hyde Park in Boston during the integration crisis in the 70's. There were Nazis there too trying to egg us on into racial warfare. When Cindy and I moved to Euclid, Ohio, again we faced the integration of the public schools. When we were in West Virginia there was a cross burning. It seems a black kid took a white girl on a date. I immediately spoke with a black pastor in town and hundreds of us marched together from St Mark's Episcopal Church to St Paul's Missionary Baptist Church. Even the Governor of West Virginia joined our efforts to renounce this act of hatred and intimidation. We demonstrated our solidarity for racial and human harmony.

By the way my life has been threatened several times along the way. I have found myself at the center of many struggles. There was a time when someone called Cindy to say; "We're going to kill your husband!" Cindy had the presence of mind to say, in her best Boston accent; "Yeah, take a numbah, I want to kill him too sometimes."

The events of this past last week have left many of us shell-shocked. Where are we headed as a country? Can you imagine a march where the message of racial

superiority, anti-semitism, hatred and violence is not soundly and convincingly renounced by the chief executive officer of the nation?

Even before yesterday's demonstration on the Common, one Bostonian travelled to Charlottesville and proudly declared in an interview; "Hitler was right!" and "Auschwitz was a five star resort!" Others chanted "Blood and Soil" during a torchlight parade last week. The expression was popularized by the prominent Nazi theorist Richard Walther Darré in 1930. The Nazi Party embraced the expression "Blood and Soil" as one of its chief ideological slogans. I renounce such statements as utterly contrary to everything this country stands for and contrary to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. I only wish that our chief executive leadership knew this history well enough to renounce it with equally convincing authority.

Driving an automobile into a crowd of demonstrators in Charlottesville or a van into a gathering of tourists in Barcelona are both acts of terrorism. Period. When anyone uses theology or ideology to justify acts of violence, we have no choice but to renounce such acts immediately and hold those responsible to account swiftly.

Enough of that for now. Lets look at what the Scriptures have to say to us today. Interestingly enough the assigned lectionary for the day deals with issues of racism, slavery and oppression. Isn't that interesting!

We begin with the [Gospel for the day](#). At no time in history have we needed the Gospel more urgently than we do now. Jesus led his disciples on a walk to Tyre and Sidon. By the way, that's a walk of about 124 miles from Jerusalem. Quite a hike! There must have been some discussion along the way about the conflict



between Jesus and the religious authorities in Jerusalem and then I suggest to you that there must have been questions about why they were heading deeper and deeper into Canaan. Was he not sent to the House of Israel? Why then did they find themselves so deep in foreign territory?

Finally a Canaanite woman confronted Jesus with a plea that he heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon. Let's be clear, this was a Canaanite woman, a woman of a different racial and ethnic class than the Jews. She was, horrors, a Gentile, a foreigner! Jesus, playing into the disciples' prejudice and racism, ignored her. They told Jesus to send her away. Jesus made it clear he was sent by God to the lost sheep of Israel. She knelt down before him and begged him for help. His answer to her doesn't sound like Jesus to me two thousand years later. We know now that Jesus' love was for all people without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, or orientation. But we did not know that then. So, reflecting their prejudice and bigotry Jesus said to her; "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The woman's response was astonishing. Instead of slinking away in dejected rejection, she said; "Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

In an instant the Savior's face was transfigured by the love of God made flesh and blood in him; "O woman great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire."

Jesus breaks the dividing wall among us then and there. Whatever dividing wall you wish to erect, Jesus breaks it down. Racial divides, gone. All other convenient pigeon holes we wish to use to classify folk. No more.

Thankfully, more and more we as a church are becoming a "House of Prayer for ALL People." In our own historic context in Montana, our relationship with Native American folks also needs an honest to God reality check. As a matter of fact, I thank God for recent events. For now we all have some soul searching to do.

You know, I have a vision for us as a nation and as a people. The vision is not new to me but as old as the Republic itself. Imagine if you will the American Bald Eagle. It is a noble vision the Native American community revered deeply.

Thankfully, I'm bald so it may help envision what I seek to say. The eagle has two wings. A left wing and a right wing like all birds. Ben Franklin, is reputed to have suggested the turkey as our national bird given the factious nature of the body politic. But consider the eagle. On the left wing let us postulate the possibility of Democrats, progressives, and liberals. On the right let me suggest we may find Republicans, traditionalists, and conservatives. For an eagle or any bird to get off the ground, it will need both wings, but for it to soar it will need every single feather working in concert together.



This will mean that as responsible citizens we must reclaim the center. We must renounce the extreme. By that, I mean there must be a place where we can hold conversation with one another when we agree and when we disagree. True enough, we tend to seek out like minded people for much of our lives. But where we really soar is when we can work in concert with those who most differ from us. There is a thing

called bi-partisanship and Congress. If we are to deal with matters of urgent concern such as health care, infrastructure, unemployment, poverty, the national budget and so on, we must work together. This will allow the great symbol of our national experience not only to get off the ground and fly, if we begin to act as grown ups and responsible citizens, we can soar!

As for those in the extreme where hatefulness and violence are embraced. We categorically reject that. The politics of "divide and conquer" is much in vogue these days, often has been in history. But such an approach to our common life is not reflective of our better angels. Since a boy the American credo I hold dear has been and continues to be that we are "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

As for slavery, Joseph knew first hand what that was like. [In our first lesson today](#) we read where Joseph said; "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." God has redeemed history before. God will redeem history again as soon as we listen up to God! In the sweetness of reconciliation Joseph "fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers

and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him." That's when their spirits soared like an eagle. The spirit of the Psalmist soars today with these words;

"1 Oh, how good and pleasant it is, *
when brethren live together in unity!
2 It is like fine oil upon the head *
that runs down upon the beard,
3 Upon the beard of Aaron, *
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.
4 It is like the dew of Hermon *
that falls upon the hills of Zion.
5 For there the Lord has ordained the blessing: *
life for evermore."

~Psalm 133

Eternal Life folks or hatred, violence, and death? That is the choice that always stands before us. Bishop Brookhart writes of what happened in Charlottesville; "This event, which included the death of a young woman, reminds us that disciples of Jesus cannot tolerate or condone white supremacy and racism."

Allow me to add this from my namesake Paul in [today's Epistle](#); "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Or as we read in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus; "Bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all...until all of us come to the unity of the faith...to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." Soaring words indeed.

Yes, my spirit soars in Jesus. I pray this is how it shall always be with us. May God bless us, everyone!

In the Name of God, the Most Holy, Undivided and Everlasting Trinity. Amen.

Fr Paul