

July 11, 2016 12:10 Mass St. Augustine Cathedral

**Mass of Remembrance and Prayers for Peace and Justice**

**In light of the Violence, Racial Divisions and Death Last Week (Baton Rouge---one black man killed by police, Minneapolis---one black man killed by police, and Dallas—5 policemen killed; 7 injured)**

We come together in the middle of this first day of a new work week, but with our hearts still grieving over the awful violence we witnessed last week in Baton Rouge, Minneapolis, and Dallas.

Our country is mourning. And while the families of Alton Sterling, 37, of Baton Rouge; Philando Castile, 32, of St. Paul; and Lorne Ahrens, 48—Michael Krol, 40 (originally from here in Michigan) —Michael Smith, 55—Brent Thompson, 43—and Patrick Zammaritta, 32—all of Dallas prepare to bury their loved ones, the rest of us are left to deal with many questions, most of which have few good answers.

While we were blessed with a beautiful July summer weekend, there was a pall of sadness over these days that, I assume, led many people to have heart-to-heart conversations within their own families and households over this weekend; which led some other people to participate in protest marches, and still others to attend interfaith and community memorial services to remember those who were killed, to spiritually support their families, and to pray for our nation and our world. And that is how we begin this new week as we come together to celebrate this Holy Mass in which we remember those who have died, and pray for an end to violence and for peace and justice in our world, in our country and in our families.

The 24-hour news cycle TV programs had multiple experts being interviewed throughout these days expressing with great conviction their informed opinions on what has brought our country to this point and identifying strategies for how to “fix”, or change, the problems that we are facing.

While there are no simple explanations or easy answers, it seems very clear to me that the more our country, and our world, drift away from any conscious sense that God is our ultimate strength and that living in God’s ways is our only guarantee of finding peace and happiness, these awful events will not go away.

Until we collectively remember who we are in God's sight----His sons and daughters, and therefore sisters and brothers in the Family of God----that we are redeemed and saved sisters and brothers in Christ our Savior----Until we realize that doing what we're doing, and living in the way that we are living, is not working because it's counter to God's Plan for us----Until we find the will to reconcile with one another, to turn away from sin and choose to live in unity and peace with one another---the other opinions that we find and the solutions to "fix" the problem will fail.

God's Holy Word which we just heard says it very clearly. In the First Reading the Prophet Isaiah was being extremely critical of the religious leaders who offered "empty" sacrifices to God; they went through the motions, but their hearts were not in what they were doing. And so after criticizing them for what they were doing wrong, Isaiah, on God's behalf, told them what they needed to do that was right: *"Wash yourselves clean; put away your misdeeds from before My eyes; Cease doing evil; Learn to do good; Make justice your aim; Redress the wronged; Hear the orphan's plea; defend the widow."* The only "sacrifice" that God wants, as He has clearly told us, is a generous and contrite heart.

And in today's Gospel passage, Jesus is very clear on what the solution to our problems is. *"You have heard the commandment: 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. But what I say to you is....."* We know the rest of it. What good does revenge, retaliation, and escalated hatred and anger get us except an entire society filled with blind and toothless people if we continue with the "eye for an eye; tooth for a tooth" mentality.

Those tendencies are very human. If you hurt me, then I'll hurt you worse. Last week is a snapshot into how those practices work.

Jesus, as always, has the answer. It's not retaliation; it's reconciliation. It's not escalated hatred and violence, it's love and having justice as our aim/goal/priority, and it's working for peace.

If we really did what God told us through Isaiah the Prophet----if we really made "justice our aim"----if we really worked for a truly just society and world, there would be no need for revenge or retaliation.

Jesus also told us: *"You have heard the commandment 'You shall love your countryman but hate you enemy'. My command to you is love your enemies and pray for your persecutors."*

Jesus has already won that battle when He came into our world, took on our human nature, lived our human life, taught us how to be fully human, and then, took on Himself the sins of the entire world----past, present, and future----and destroyed the power of sin, evil and death through His death on the cross and His resurrection to new life.

That is the definition of hope. To live in the midst of the difficulties and challenges of our world, even in the midst of the sadness of these current circumstances, but to not give in to, or allow, those circumstances to prevail.

Jesus tells us, and has shown us, the answer: the sacrificial and reconciling love of Jesus is the answer.

There is no magic bullet or simple answer to the difficulties that led to last week's acts of hatred, violence and death. There's no government legislation that will change it.

God has given us the answer since the beginning of time. We heard it again today in God's Holy Word. And we are celebrating the answer right here in this Holy Mass.

It begins with each of us. Is there a person with whom you are "at odds" or against whom you're holding a grudge? Are there people in your life who you see only through the eyes of prejudice? Are you----am I----really taking seriously the solution that Jesus lays out for us today, as challenging as it is---are we trying to be holy? Are we working at becoming perfect? Do we have as our life's goal to be a saint, and to get to Heaven? The solution really does begin with each of us.

As Jesus told us in yesterday's powerful *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, all of us are "neighbor" to one another. In fact, we're even more than that----we are sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ.

As we remember all those who have died in acts of violence and hatred, as we pray for their families and loved ones, as we pray for peace and work for justice, we realize that we cannot do this on our own. That is why we come together here to pray with one another. That is why we come together here to be nourished with God's Holy Word and with the Eucharist, our spiritual strength and nourishment. That is why we pray during this Mass for Reconciliation----and that is why, with God's grace, we continue to live in joyful hope as we make every

effort to live in peace and justice with one another in this world, and to prepare for eternal life in the world still to come.

God bless you, now and always!