



HOPE IN A TIME OF FEAR AND ANGER

Last week in Alabama a unique museum and memorial was opened to the public. It was a museum dedicated to the victims of lynching in the South. This museum forces us to look honestly at the dark past of our history. From the end of the Civil War to the equal rights movement, lynching was a terrible and cruel practice in many rural states, mostly centered in the South and in Indiana. The victims were mostly African American men.



Fr. Tom Turleman, Pastor

This museum has opened at an opportune moment to remind us that, as Sojourners magazine founder Rev. James Wallis reminds us, racism and xenophobia is still with us and is the original sin of this country. Rev. Wallis reminds it that it eats at the heart and creates fear and hate, both elements that are antithetical to what it means to be a Christian. This special museum is timely because we have seen in the last three years a massive increase in racial attacks, policies that directly assault different religious practices, and that is now at the heart of our immigration policy. Not since the days of lynching have we seen such a wave of fear and gratuitous cruelty.

Tragically, we have seen this take place on our border. The politically deliberate exaggerations of

a crisis on the border, and the assault on desperate refugees seeking a safe place to survive, is unconscionable and counter to what this country supposedly stands for. (Recent Homeland Security report states that the southern border had the lowest number of illegal border crossings in 47 years. NPR report Dec. 5, 2017, US Customs and Border Protection, 2017 Border Security Report) Sending out the national guard to protect us from 300 women and children in a so called “caravan” seeking protection from violence and death is beneath contempt and is a sign of how debased our politics has become in the last few years.

When we forget the principles and values that are the foundation of the country, we are in real trouble. Guess what? We are in real trouble. In the meantime, terrified refugee children are separated from their parents. Innocent people, seeking protection from violence and death, are being hauled off to jail. Countries from Africa, Asia and South America are labeled as undesirable. Sadly hate, fear, racism and xenophobia are alive and well in the land, and our Christian faith is one of its many victims.

In his recent exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad), Pope Francis puts caring for migrants and opposing abortion on Equal footing. Francis reminds us that as Catholics we can no longer compartmentalize one issue over the other and be understood as authentic. Both are part of the spectrum that effects people’s “right to life.” He calls for a holiness of action. He is even more emphatic in the exhortation when he states: “

We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue...That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian.” He adds that “welcoming the stranger at the door is fundamental to the faith...This is not a notion invented by some Pope, or

The idea that a suffering mother, escaping violence in Honduras, stranded in Tijuana, and our government threatening to take her children away if she dares to ask for help, is somehow not an issue for Christians of conscience, is no longer viable.

So what do we do in sad times like this?

- First, we need to pray and lift up the victims of hate to our God. In particular we need to pray for the millions of refugees trying to escape violence in their homes. We need to pray for the victims of violence in our own country and we need to pray for those who perpetrate this hatred and fear, that they can have a change of heart and see Christ in all his children.
- Second, we need to be engaged in our community and understand fully what is going on. We need to educate ourselves, and act on that education to make sure that our country lives up to its beautiful ideals as a nation of equals and a nation populated by immigrants.

- Third, working with our bishop, we must make it very clear that respect, justice and compassion must be in the forefront in our actions. Our focus on the poor must continue as we witness to the power of Christ in our lives.
- Fourth, as a parish community, we must continue our own wonderful tradition of welcome. No matter where you are from, what language you speak, what your family make up is, or whether you are here legally or not, you will always be welcome. After all, it is our beautiful diversity that makes this parish special. Let it be known, we will never ask for papers, ever!
- Finally, we need to make sure we vote this fall to make sure that civic leaders understand that the hate and fear we are witnessing must end and that ultimately, we must transform this fear into hope. Happily, there are members in both major parties who are with us on these issues. Working with our leaders, we need to call ourselves back to greatness again. A greatness based on equality, compassion and a belief that all God’s children are a gift that makes us greater than ourselves.

If we can do this we can change the tragic direction that we are in. As Christians we can do no less. We need to address the original sins of our time and come to terms with It once and for all. Perhaps a pilgrimage to the Lynching memorial in Alabama would be a good way to start.

Yours in the Savior,
Fr. Tom

