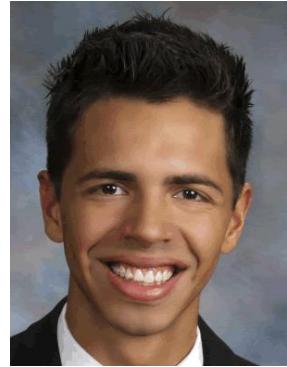


In Remembrance for the Victims of Orlando

By Ish Ruiz

June 12, 2016 will forever live in my memory.

I remember waking up to read the tragic posts on various social media pages expressing condolences, grief, anger, and devastation over a shooting in Orlando. I recall my initial shock as I learned about a shooting in a gay club, the victims, and their nationality. I recollect the initial confusion at the lack of information as the different media reports hypothesized about the number of victims, the motivations of the shooter, and the details of the attack. My emotions registered disbelief and denial. I remember praying, "Dear God, please tell me I'm dreaming."



It was not a dream.

Forty-nine of our brothers and sisters were murdered in a club in Orlando. Many of them were LGBTQ+ and many were of Puerto Rican descent. As a gay Puerto Rican man, I felt as if many of my family – my people – were forever silenced. Their forty-nine names and faces would be forever engraved in my heart. Yet, it was hard to grieve for them as politicians utilized this tragedy for their gains. It was hard to pray as Pope Francis and other bishops neglected to mention that many of the slain men and women were members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies. It was hard to find comfort when different groups continued to argue on matters of gun control and Islamophobia. How can one find peace?

But something amazing happened in the midst of all the commotion: communities rose from the suffering. Reminded of our common humanity, people came together to remind the world that love always conquers hate. Vigils held in different cities drew people together of different ages, faiths, sexual orientations, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. I was reminded that we are all one, held together in the arms of a loving God who will never abandon us. That God is made visible through the rise of community. God's face is revealed in the faces of those we love, regardless of their gender or identity. God's smile is revealed in the smiles of those LGBTQ+ people that live authentically. God's hands are revealed in the hands of the allies who hold our hands through difficult moments. God's feet are revealed in those that take a stand for justice and peace everywhere and for everyone.

The spark of hope is very much alive. It is a healthy spark that continues to grow through our communities. We must continue to feed this joyful fire with authentic witnesses of love. Like our Blessed Mother Mary, our lives must be a shining example of the light of Christ that shines through our actions and transforms the world into a more loving place.

This world is already at hand. Its incarnation depends on us!