

A hero's burial for a former Philippine dictator?

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The announcement of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte allowing former dictator Ferdinand Marcos a burial in Manila's cemetery for heroes provoked varied reactions from different sectors.

Victims of martial law abuses together and those who saw a lot of evil during the so-called dark era of the country's history initiated protest actions. Others looked at Duterte's decision as a gesture of reconciliation, hopefully to heal wounds of the past.

But a silent majority, especially the so-called millennials, seems not to care about the issue.

Do Filipinos have such a short memory so as not to take the lessons of the martial law years seriously? Are Filipinos too considerate that abuses done against them are easily forgiven and forgotten? Or, perhaps, Filipinos do not want to get involved in an issue that does not directly or personally affect them.

Whatever their perspective is concerning a political issue, such as giving Marcos a hero's burial, there

is no excuse for the church, being a strong cultural force in society, being silent about social and political discourses.

The Catholic Church in the Philippines is a significant player in the making of a Filipino conscience, primarily because most Filipinos are Catholics.

Second, the church has educational institutions all over the country that are important contributors in shaping the minds and hearts of people, as well as in training future political and economic leaders.

As one of the most influential institutions of Philippine society, the church cannot help but look at its possible influence in the apparent indifference of the youth to issues like the burial of Marcos.

The church has well-articulated social teachings that speak of church involvement in the economic, political, and cultural dimension of human life as integral to the preaching of the Gospel.

Christians are supposed to be the "salt of the earth and light of the world," or in contemporary language, agents of genuine societal transformation.

While the social teachings of the church are more than an adequate guide to the Christian praxis of justice and peace, actual concrete movements of believers working to promote the same are wanting.

Many Filipino church leaders are very good at explaining doctrinally the role of Christians in the world, but concrete movements in parishes related to justice and peace in society barely exist.

Our church leaders seem not to be keen at organizing believers into concrete action against injustice and are just content with movements that promote piety and worship.

In recent years, new movements that are responsive to the evangelization of married couples and families sprouted in the Philippines. They worship and pray together, and do many works of charity. They get a lot of support from priests and bishops.

But the formation of Christians, whether married couples or not, in the area of justice is practically nonexistent in Christian communities around the country. Most church leaders at parish level seem to find no need for such type of evangelization work.

The so-called separation between church and state may be a factor that led church leaders to shy away from political involvement of Christians. Another possible reason is a lack of expertise among many church leaders when it comes to social justice work.

A large number of our church leaders, and perhaps a majority of Catholics, still look at the church's mission and evangelization from the traditional perspective of saving man's soul. Many still believe that the good of the body is the business of the state and political issues are not the main concern of the church and its leaders.

This attitude of assigning the church the fundamental task of only saving the spiritual dimension of human beings explains why most Filipinos remain silent on the issue of a hero's burial for Marcos.

After all, they think that this particular concern has nothing to do with Christian faith. It is purely the business of the state and the government.

The dichotomy between faith and life, which can still be the dominant mindset of most Filipino church leaders and Catholics, is the most likely reason why our bishops and priests are not keen in educating people to be actively involved in political issues that are supposed to be an integral part of our Catholic Christian vocation.

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