

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Nov 28th 2018

Jesuit educational institutions have a long-standing tradition of beginning the academic year with a special Mass of the Holy Spirit. It is a prayerful gathering of Jesuit priests, students, staff and faculty from every faith tradition who come together to pray for the gift and blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the new academic year.

Four years ago as we gathered for this annual celebration, the church was full, the energy high and all who gathered were anticipating the start of a new year. Music and incense filled the sanctuary. As the liturgy began we sang these words: Here in this time, here in this place, here we are standing face to face. Here for the broken, here for the strong, here in this temple we belong. Here in our hearts, here in our lives, our God is here. As I listened to those powerful words and looked around at all who had gathered, I remember feeling joyful and very moved. Today's first reading captures my spirit that day: Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God almighty.

As the liturgy concluded, someone rushed over and handed me their cell phone explaining that the caller had looked everywhere for me and was insisting on speaking to me. As I took the phone and heard the voice of my colleague I tried to absorb the words she tearfully poured out. She explained that the husband of one of our recently retired co-workers had been killed that morning during a robbery of their store. My mind raced and my heart wanted to burst from the emotional pain and sorrow that I was feeling for my dear friend. I could barely grasp the concept of this type of violent death. Another colleague and I raced to the hospital to stand with her in solidarity knowing that words could not possibly console her but wanting to hold and comfort her.

Every day we are exposed to news close to home and around the world. There are times when we can barely grasp the truth when we hear reports of violence and tragedy. In today's readings we are invited to turn to God and Jesus whose strength and works will heal our pain. Today's first reading is from the book of Revelation and the Book of Revelation's ...basic message is that good will triumph over evil, have hope in Christ who will prevail, and faith during times of persecution.¹

As it turned out, my friend and her family did not have a specific place of worship or a faith community to turn to. However, after working at Creighton for 27 years, they felt that Creighton-St. John's was indeed their faith community and we were honored to host the funeral. The following day, she reached out and asked if I could help them plan the wake and memorial prayer service and invited me to give a reflection. One of her Jesuit friends led a beautiful wake service. Another Jesuit and I prepared the memorial/funeral service. I told her I would be honored to speak and to walk with her and her precious family every step of the way.

When I spoke during the memorial service I reflected: Last Wednesday in this church, was the annual Mass of the Holy Spirit. As the liturgy began we sang these words: 'Here in this time, here in this place, here we are standing face to face. Here for the broken, here for the strong, here in this temple we belong. Here in our hearts, here in our lives, our God is here.' I felt the presence of God during that prayerful liturgy and as I stand here face to face with you today, I feel God's loving presence once again in a completely different way, as we wrap our collective arms around this grieving family and one another.

May we never forget the message from the book of Revelation: good will triumph over evil, have hope in Christ who will prevail, and faith during times of persecution.

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