Betwixt Friday and Sunday: 
The Place of Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation

by Dave Kelly, CPPS, and Anthony Suárez-Abraham

After having experienced the long journey of Lent, we are entering a space of the church in which we celebrate the very core of who we are and what we believe. Holy Week takes us from the hosannas of Palm Sunday to the shouts of “crucify him, crucify him” of Good Friday. Ultimately, we experience suffering, death, and the resurrection of Jesus the Christ in this very short week.

If anyone has been a part of the liturgical team at a parish or been involved in any way with parish life, you know that we celebrate Holy Thursday and Good Friday with a powerful liturgy and ritual, but as soon as Good Friday is over, the lilies come out and the sanctuary is decorated for Easter. Holy Saturday, it seems, becomes a liturgical void as we prepare for Easter—it is a marginalized and forgotten in-between space; it becomes, even if unintentionally, an “other.”

A short time ago, Bobby, a twenty-year-old young man who lives right down the block from the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) Center at Chicago’s “back of the yards” neighborhood, was killed. He was someone everyone knew and loved. He was always “out and about” and always ready to greet people with his infectious smile. His violent death was a shock to the whole community. Outside his immediate family, no one was more devastated than his close friends. The day after the shooting, we held a prayer service at the site of violence; the next day we gathered together with his friends and listened to their anger, grief, and pain. Days later the funeral spoke of the new life given to us by Christ Jesus. It was a resurrection liturgy. For Bobby and his family and friends, the experience of the paschal mystery was very real.

But Bobby’s death still lingers. The sting of his loss remains. The trauma is still visible in the faces of his family and the youth who were his friends. The infectious smile that greeted the community while he was “out and about” is noticeably absent. The experience of Good Friday is still very real; the joy of Easter has not yet come.

Trauma is about the storm that does not go away. “It is a story of the remaining.” Shelly Rambo, in her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, speaks of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the trauma that is a part of the story of post-Katrina New Orleans. Even as people spoke about the new and the rebuilt New Orleans, with

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the obvious hope to bring back tourists and businesses, it was not the reality of the residents of New Orleans’s Lower Ninth Ward. The devastation and loss in New Orleans is still there and real, even all these years later. There are still the remnants of washed-out foundations and houses in ruins, scars that are still very evident. The death of more than 1,500 persons along with the countless communities that were shattered is a harried reminder of the void. The sting of so much loss remains. People keep saying that we have to get over it already. They talk about the storm as something in the past, that it is gone. But the “after the storm” is always here.

Holy Saturday, according to Shelly Rambo, can offer a powerful moment, a space that shares the perspective of those who suffer from trauma. It provides a place to engage in the work of trauma healing—of rediscovering the long and arduous process of peace and reconciliation. Holy Saturday, this in-between or middle ground—the apparent place of “liturgical void”—enables us to embrace the ongoing and very real trauma that marks the lives of so many people like the family, friends, and community of Bobby, even as we long for and believe in the resurrection.

Holy Saturday is where the church must live—embracing the tragedy of Good Friday, even as we lift up and celebrate the hope of resurrected life. For many, the alleluias of Easter are not yet. But to believe that there is the promise of new life, to know that the bereaved are not alone in their pain, is the Easter hope. Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that

if the church wishes to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ, it must become aware of itself from the underneath, from among the poor of this world, the exploited classes, the despised ethnic groups, the marginalized cultures. It must descend into the hell of this world, into communion with the misery, injustice, struggle, and hopes of the wretched of the earth—for ‘of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

The Church must remain at the place of the poor, in the marginal places of trauma, to live in solidarity with the poor and thus become a “Church that is poor and for the poor.”

For this reason Holy Saturday is the space where the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation finds its place to remain with those who have been devastated and/or marginalized by trauma. PBMR started in the jubilee year 2000 in response to the church’s call to “open wide the doors to Christ.” The ministry of PBMR reaches out to those impacted by violence and/or conflict (the victim, the wrongdoer, and the community); in so doing, it shares in the vision of Pope Francis, who often reminds us that it is the forgotten, in-between, and dark places—the margins—that teach us the great mysteries of love and hope. To encounter the living God, “we must tenderly kiss the wounds of Jesus in our hungry, poor, sick, imprisoned brothers and sisters.”

It is the vision of PBMR to give witness to the human dignity of those impacted by violence and/or conflict through radical hospitality, hope, and healing. This is both the vision and the goal of PBMR. In offering hospitality, living in hope, and working through the trauma of so many, we become an alternative community where hospitality and hope are the reality—a community that does not gloss over the trauma, but lives as a new creation in the many places and experiences of trauma.

Radical hospitality is the relentless engagement of youth and families. It is the very intentional stance of arms wide open in welcoming. So often the trauma of violence and abandonment of our youth causes them to surround themselves with a guarded disposition; radical hospitality understands the impact of trauma and meets them where they are, seeking to create a relationship of trust and welcome. It is to see beyond the initial mistrust, the

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guarded demeanor and work to create a welcoming space. In Romans 12:13 the apostle Paul implores us to “practice hospitality” with the people of God who are in need.

Young persons who grow up in “communities of trauma”—where schools are underfunded and under-resourced, where jobs are scarce, where violence is a daily reality, and where families feel overwhelmed to simply survive—often feel as though they do not belong, disconnected from the hope of what may be a better tomorrow. It is here where PBMR engages in its ministry of hope, a message deeply rooted in the gospel of liberation. It provides an alternate vision to the victims of trauma, restoring in them a sense of meaning and purpose. Hope provides a new framework, setting them free to make choices that impact their lives and the lives of those they care about. A significant dimension of the work of PBMR is that of changing the narrative of disconnection and failure to that of belonging, possibility, and grace-filled promise. We witness to hope by being in solidarity with those who live the affects and effects of violence and/or conflict, calling them friends (cf. Jn 15:12–15), and working to create a better tomorrow with the assurance of things hoped for (cf. Heb 11:1).

Finally, PBMR seeks to be an agent for healing. Through relentless engagement with the youth and their families, we seek to build a relationship of trust. Within that relationship of trust, we seek to engage in the work of the healing of wounds. Through a restorative justice philosophy, we engage the trauma brought on by violence and suffering. Peacemaking circles, mentoring, and storytelling—these are ways through which PBMR fosters safe spaces to give voice to an individual’s personal suffering. We experience healing as we place our story with the story of others and, ultimately, recognize our story within the story of the paschal mystery, thereby becoming a new creation.

But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body (2 Cor 4:7–10).

For PBMR, the gates of the reign of God are marked by the many marginal spaces between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We walk in the place between the “already, and not yet,” accompanying those victimized by trauma who have yet to experience fully the hope of the resurrection. In this way we participate in the church’s missio Dei to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free (Lk 4:18).

Holy Saturday embraces the reality of the suffering and the pain among us, refusing to gloss over the trauma. It is not a linear moment in which we trudge through the pain, thereby putting it behind us. It is a sacred place in which we move between and betwixt the horror of Good Friday and the alleluias of Easter Sunday. Holy Saturday is the space and the place of PBMR.