

## Editorial

by Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF

**A Call to Solidarity—“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

**A Call to Hope-Filled Action—“Repent and believe in the Gospel.”**

**A**s this issue goes to press, we begin the Season of Lent 2017. The past several months have been quite tumultuous. Many would argue that we are living in a “Dark Moment in History”—a world that is more divided than ever. We live in times far from ordinary!

This Spring Semester I am teaching two courses for graduate students who are seeking to serve as ministers in the Church. Both courses—Catholic Social Teaching and Mission, and The Ethics of Power and Racial Justice—require students to face the multiple divides of our world headlong, and in light of the Gospel. The daily headlines come careening into the classroom, after having, often surprisingly, cut deeply into the student’s sense of morality and justice:

- What must we do with this discriminatory travel ban?
- Are First Amendment rights being removed as Muslims are interrogated about their religious beliefs upon arriving at U.S. airports?
- Can ICE Agents arrest the immigrants that are housed near our school by Catholic Charities?
- It seems what President Trump and Steve Bannon are doing fits the very patterns we’ve read about that history shows were the first steps toward an autocracy – is this right?
- When a group of reporters of a similar political persuasion were banned from a White House press conference, was this the start of the loss of the Freedom of the Press?
- As we read about the situations that preceded the Armenian Genocide, the rise of Hitler, or, more recently, the diminishment of Hungarian democracy, the similarities to current events are shocking!

These events are indeed stunningly distressing and raise new awarenesses that U.S. citizens have to now grapple with. In the comforts of a “stable democracy” many of us have been lulled into a comfort zone that permitted an often unchallenged understanding of our faith.

The good news is that the future ministers in my classroom, and elsewhere, are asking the right questions. Numerous sources reveal data indicating that the millennial generation is less partisan and far more ready to support politicians who address real needs and values that sing in harmony with the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching and

the values and vision of the Gospels—health care, poverty, racism, job training, renewable energy infrastructure, and other investments in people who have lived far too long at the margins of U.S. society.

Common wisdom suggests that “It takes two to tango!” So the point here is not to cast blame, but rather to reflect on what it means to hear the words that accompany our being signed with ashes on Ash Wednesday. What does it mean in a deeply divided country and world to “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”? What difference will it make in my life and yours if you and I “Repent and believe in the Gospel”?

The Ash Wednesday Lectionary Readings are quite provocative and deserve our discerning attention at this moment in history. The prophet Joel cautions us that sin and division is a communal affair. No human being can thrive in isolation. From conception to our natural death, we—indeed, the very elements that compose our bodies—are interdependent with other people and the entire created world. Who we are and what we learn to be good and true, and how we act, are heavily influenced by family, friends, where we go, and what media we expose ourselves to—and more. It is through all of this that our values and vision of the world and other people is shaped and solidified. Thus, Joel reminds Israel, and us, that each person in their own way is in need of repentance; God is not pleased with divided hearts and sinfulness.

What is it that is dividing us? What is going on within each of us that keeps us from living and loving as God requires? Where is our capacity for mercy, justice, hope, solidarity with others... especially those “Others” of a different race, gender, sexual orientation, political party, economic status .... or ....? Indeed, we are ALL brothers and sisters, and if we are to ever become reconciled, as St. Paul pleads we must, each one of us needs to get serious and *very practical* about finding ways to come together around the kind of grace, mercy, and peace that our God extends to us. The model is none other than Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew we see one who calls us to humility and generosity—to remember who we are as Christians who put **trust in knowing whose we are**. Our generosity needs to be extended to not only the economically poor and oppressed, but, more importantly in these divided times, to the poor one deep inside of us—in our fearful hearts. Standing in fearful isolation in our communities and in the world **is not our calling**. Rather, we are to be witnesses and ambassadors for Christ, sacrificially giving of ourselves to unite, support, include, communicate, care—and more. Yes—there are **some practical things** each one of us can learn to **do differently**.<sup>1</sup>

Working together, then,  
we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.  
For he says:  
*In an acceptable time I heard you,  
and on the day of salvation I helped you.*  
Behold, now is a very acceptable time;  
behold, now is the day of salvation. 2 Cor 6:1-2

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We are called to solidarity. “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” We are called to hope-filled action. **“If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”**

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend the resources developed by Chicago’s 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice, *Centerings* (Winter 2017) available at <http://8thdaycenter.org/centerings/>.

## Cover Image:



“Sea of Galilee,” our evocative, painterly cover image, is the work of Manila-based photographer Pia Sison. Pia teaches Scripture courses at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies (IFRS), and De La Salle University, where she is a Ph.D. candidate in Applied Theology specializing in Biblical Studies. She obtained her M.A. in Religious Studies with an emphasis in Scripture, at Maryhill School of Theology, also in Manila. An alumna of Bat Kol Institute’s Scripture programs in Jerusalem where she immersed in the study of Exodus (2012), Teshuva (2015), and Genesis (2016), Pia complemented her training in Scripture with the practice of her art, producing beautiful photo essays from each trip.