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Companions on the Journey

January 12, 2020

Dear Friends,

Next weekend is the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Service held at Bethlehem Baptist Church on Dager Road and Penllyn Pike. For many Americans today Dr. King is a figure from history. Assassinated in 1968, he has been dead for over fifty years. A lifetime for many people. But for me he was a heroic figure. Today many people know him only as a civil rights figure especially in the arena of Black-White relationships. But for me he was so much more. He was a believer in Jesus Christ, a Baptist minister. He sought equal opportunities for his own people but for all minorities.

One thing that is often lost in the stories about Dr. King is that he was thoroughly non-violent. That does not mean that he was not victimized by violence. He was. That does not mean that he was unfamiliar with racially based violence in this country. He was very familiar. What it does mean is this. He did not react violently when he was treated violently.

There were times when water cannons were turned on him while marching in protest. Or attack dogs were released. Dr. King was handcuffed and carted off into jail on a number of occasions. BUT. He never did respond to violence with violence of his own. That includes verbal violence. He experienced that but did not respond in kind. I mention this because it is hard for us today to remember that there were times in this country when important persons did really try to carry themselves with a certain decorum and did not pander to the baser human instincts. Dr. King would not respond in kind when he was the object of violence.

The great irony, of course, is that a bullet from an assassin's rifle killed him who chose the stance of non-violence. Does that remind you of anyone? Yes, Our Lord Jesus Christ also chose the path of non-violence. He too was killed because of what he believed and because of what he stood for and because of what he taught. Jesus was a threat to the powerful people of his day and Dr. King was a threat to the powerful people of his day.

Right after he was assassinated there was a wave of violence that swept our country and unleashed terrible destruction and reprisals. We have hardly recovered. But that doesn't mean that we have not made any progress. That does not mean that we cannot make progress. The spirit of the man lives on. And the thing about violence is that it always seems to be winning even when it is really losing. It loses because it does not offer anything, not anything that makes a difference, not anything that lasts. Violence actually has been overcome, rendered powerless because all it can do is kill. And with Jesus the killing which results in death has been overcome.

The final victory of life has been assured. Come to the Service on Sunday the 19th and honor the memory of a great man who lay down his life in our time—not for himself but for those who came after.

Peace,
Msgr, McHenry