

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Nov 15th 2014

An unjust judge does not fear God or respect people when a powerless widow with no legal rights asks for legal protection. This scenario does not inspire confidence that the widow will receive justice. Yet her persistence prevails. The unjust judge recognizes that his life will be better if the widow receives what she is asking for. In this case, enlightened self-interest leads to justice.

On November 16, 1989, a horrifying injustice occurred in El Salvador against two powerless people and their six significantly more powerful companions. Yet persistence has brought little justice.

Tomorrow we remember the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the night when eight 'UCA Martyrs' - six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 15 year old daughter, who were murdered by an elite, U.S.-trained battalion of the Salvadoran military at the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador. Those murdered were Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Segundo Montes, Arnando Lopez, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez, Juan Ramon Moreno, Julia Elba Ramos, and Cecilia Ramos--eight people in a civil war that claimed 75,000 lives in a tiny country of only five million people.

Despite the persistent pleas for justice around the world, including tremendous efforts from the Society of Jesus, justice has not been served in the case of the UCA martyrs. Low-level military personnel who carried out the orders of superior officers were imprisoned briefly, but those who ordered the murders have not been punished.

"Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night? . . . I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly." (Luke 18:7) We can hope that one day God's grace will lead to meaningful justice in the case of the UCA Martyrs. Perhaps enlightened self-interest of the powerful in El Salvador and the United States will bring about justice for the tens of thousands of civilians who died during the Salvadoran war, including not only the UCA martyrs but also Archbishop Oscar Romero and four American church women in 1980.

The most prominent of the UCA Martyrs was Ignacio Ellacuria, the rector (president) of the university. Ellacuria was a tireless advocate for peace and justice in El Salvador. Although he believed we must make a "preferential option for the poor," he was equally critical of both sides in the violent conflict. Ellacuria called for a "negotiated settlement," which made him enemies on both sides of the war.

A friend of Ellacuria's recalls one of his frequent sayings - "Live as though the truth were true." The 'truth' for Ellacuria included a faith that was so intertwined with justice that he was willing to die for living that truth. "Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." (3John 1: 8) Twenty-five years after his brutal murder, we need to remember Ellacuria and people like him who work for truth, love, justice, and peace, all as part of their faith. Who are the people we know who do the work of truth, love, justice, peace, and faith? How can we support them? How can we become them?

To learn more about the 25th Anniversary of the UCA Martyrs, and the other Martyrs of El Salvador: Archbishop Oscar Romero, and the four American church women, consider this site:
<http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Martyrs>

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