

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jun 1st 2015

Today's readings and Memorial of St. Justin, the Martyr beg for reflection on the meaning of death in our world. We can reflect specifically on physical death or even narrow the focus further to martyrdom. Or, we can think of death in a broader context as loss or letting go. I would like to share a little on both but I would like to focus, on what attitude we bring to the subject of death. Let's look at martyrdom. With the recent rash of Christians dying a martyr's death in the middle east, we have a current experience we can use for this reflection.

First, what is the attitude of those doing the killing? What are they thinking? I can't say that I know but I would think they might think they are doing something good. Maybe they think they are ridding the world of an evil, eliminating someone they are afraid of, sending a message or exercising power.

The martyrs themselves, what is their attitude toward death? I imagine they may be afraid. They might think they are standing up for what they believe in, following in Jesus' footsteps. They may just feel powerless. What about those, their friends and family that are left behind, what is their attitude toward death? They may be angry and outraged, full of sorrow, have thoughts of retaliation.

Certainly, they are grieving. In all cases, I would ask what their attitude says about their image of God? I would venture to guess that in the midst of death, especially tragic, personal, physical death, we can forget that death is just a part of the Paschal Mystery. We forget that after death comes new life, new beginnings. And, in fact, the new life cannot happen unless there is death. Death is transition from one life, or one way of life, to another. The new life may be better, it may not be. What we do know is that it will be different than life before the death. How do we choose to respond to death? Can we respond out of Love? What would that look like?

I would like to "pan out" for a moment and talk about how this might apply to our everyday lives, which are full of deaths. Most of us don't have a personal experience of martyrdom. We do experience the death of friends and family, but the more common experience of death in our lives comes in the form of other life transitions; children leaving home, loss of job, birth of a new baby, adult children returning home, even the ending of a day is a loss.

I recently went home on a kind of pilgrimage. It had been about 30 years since I had been home to just experience where I grew up. I was prepared for things to be different. What I was not prepared for was the amount of death I experienced. The trees I loved at my house growing up were gone from disease, my school buildings (high school and elementary) were torn down, the place of my high school job was closed and looked like a ghost town, the city had a sense of abandonment as did my first home, it was boarded up and deserted. I am still working through the meaning for me personally of encountering and experiencing all this death but what I hold on to is that with the love of God, death

is a doorway to new life. New life is available for these communities. New life is available for us if we can grieve and let go of the death and make room for new possibilities.

What is our attitude and how do we respond to these daily losses in our lives? If we can respond to these deaths with an attitude of transition to new life and out of Love, maybe we could then better respond to the more physical, tragic or unnecessary deaths. Today as we contemplate the meaning death, let's be aware of the small and big deaths in our lives. Let's pray for one another to remember the new life to come and let's pray especially for those experiencing martyrdom, those doing the killing, those being killed and those left behind.

Amy Hoover-Creighton University Retreat Center