

Daily Meditation 04-08-24

Can the Best of Humanity Please Show Up?

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we're calling on the wisdom of Jose Andreas, who is calling on the best of humanity, the best of humanity to rise up.

And he's addressing specifically the war in Gaza. And he calls for the best of Israel to rise up with its deep and professed commitment to justice and compassion.

In my essay and meditation, I'm trying to distribute this call to many other areas of our common life today, a common good around the world.

And one person who rose up and represents the best of humanity this past week who was in the news was Philip Berrigan, the brother of Daniel Barragan, the Jesuit poet and activist.

Philip, too, was an activist, spent many years in prison because of his nonviolent commitment to waking people up about war, the Vietnam War. And a new book of his writings has come out. (He's been dead for a number of years.) The new book is called Ministry of Risk. *A Ministry of Risk*.

And there's a particular agenda that really strikes me as important for our time--because Phillip in many ways was ahead of his time--and it's about the relationship between the environmental crisis and militarism. We are spending as much money as we do on war.

This is what he wrote in 1993:

The greatest assault on the environment comes from military sources. The greatest poisoning of our air, soil, and water comes from war and preparation for war. Can it be that our hatred for one another, our hatred for one another, represented by nuclear and conventional weapons, puts us at war with the Earth, making us masters and despoilers of the Earth? Exactly so.

So, I think this is a very important observation. In fact, more and more environmentalists are supporting this out. But what I like about Philip is that he's going to something deeper than just the issue of the Defense Department and so forth, the decisions it makes. He's naming the bottom line, which is hatred.

Our hatred for one another, represented by nuclear and conventional weapons, puts us at war with the earth.

So we're carrying this spiritual problem, this shadow, not only towards so-called enemies in the political sphere, but we carry this hatred toward our relationship to the earth as well. I think that is very insightful. And it also gives us a hint as to the way out.

Now another figure who was in the news this week, and certainly deserves a shout out for being a representative of the best of humanity, is Bishop Gumbleton, the Catholic bishop, auxiliary bishop from Detroit, who died this past week, 94 years of age.

And he was an activist in the 60s and beyond who addressed the anti-war issues, was the founder of Pax Christi, a movement in the Catholic Church in America for peace, and was also a founder of Bread for the World, an advocacy organization seeking to end world hunger.

He never rose in the hierarchical ladder. He was appointed an auxiliary bishop in Detroit at the age of 38. He was the youngest bishop in America. But because he took a path of protest, he never rose in the church hierarchy. He stayed forever in an inner city parish, St. Leo in Detroit. But he spoke out and he visited places like El Salvador, Haiti, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, standing up for peace and nonviolence.

And he was a great hero of my generation, really, because he did take on forces within the Church, as well as within a society that did not want to hear that much about peace.

But one person who knew him very well, a Catholic sister who worked with him a lot in Pax Christi, said this: "When push came to shove, he would always go for the gospel over the institution."

He would always go for the gospel over the institution.

And he ran a series, a column of articles in the *National Catholic Reporter* called "The Peace Pulpit." And many of his writings were sermons that he was giving in his church in St. Leo, in inner city Detroit.

He was arrested many times for civil disobedience. And he protested against nuclear weapons and against the 2003 Iraq War. And certainly, his visits to El Salvador and Nicaragua, when he pointed out the evil things going on there, sponsored often by the American government in the 60s, late 60s, did not endear him to certain forces in the Christian church.

So, he was a great human being, and he put aside any ambitions to become a successful ecclesial prelate in the church, and instead he supported women's ordination and gay rights. And he supported the fight against covering up priestly pedophilia.

He even testified against--publicly in Congress--against slowing down the reportage and examination of priestly pedophilia. And even in that formal context, he said that he had been abused by a priest when he was young. This, too, did not endear him to many in the hierarchy and eventually he was, in fact, forced into retirement.

So, it was said by Sister Ann McCarthy, a Benedictine staff member of Pax Christi, “He epitomized the best of the Catholic tradition.”

Yes, he had a conscience, and he expanded it. He learned from those who suffered more than he did around the world. And he spoke and he witnessed to peace and to justice.

So we all remember Bishop Gumbleton with thanks for his courage and generosity and integrity.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.ⁱ

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