

# 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Martyrdom of 6 Jesuits and Their Two Women Colleagues in El Salvador

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*[The notes offered here are intended to suggest ideas for homilists to choose from  
and weave into homilies appropriate to their specific community settings.]*

***“For you yourselves know very well that  
the Day of the Lord will come like a thief at night.  
When people are saying ‘Peace and security,’ then sudden disaster comes upon them,  
Like labor pains upon a pregnant woman,  
And they will not escape.” [1 Thess. 5:2-3]***

## 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Standard Readings:

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

I Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

1. The **Day of the Lord** did come for these 8 martyrs as a thief in the night.
  - a. Recall the story and the setting of their martyrdom at the Jesuit Community.
  - b. As we commemorate and celebrate their martyrdom, what revelation do we find in God’s Word to us today?
2. The **Day of the Lord** for Paul points to the Second Coming of Christ, the Day of Judgment when the Reign of God and God’s justice will come to fulfillment.
3. The **Day of the Lord** for the Salvadoran martyrs: Jon Sobrino, a member of the same Jesuit community who survived because he was traveling the night of November 16th, has written<sup>1</sup> that **Ignacio Ellacuría’s** strongest and most central motivation was **the pain of the people**. Ellacuría spoke often of the mission of the Church in his time and place as taking “the crucified people” down from the cross.
  - a. “Ellacuría was moved to the depths by the sight of a people prostrate, oppressed, deceived, ridiculed....Indeed, he never made peace with the pain it implies.” [pp.5-7, *passim*]
  - b. His vision of the Reign of God and the coming of the **Day of the Lord**, then, was a vision of God’s liberation of the crucified majority of the human family trapped in unjust poverty.
    - i. The work for liberation of the crucified people was the central reality of his life as a Christian. Everything else about him – his profession as a philosopher, his Jesuit community, the university he ran – were focused on that liberation of the oppressed, that historical realization of the Reign of God. [p. 2]
  - c. As we celebrate the grace and revelation of the martyrs of the Catholic University in El Salvador on this anniversary, we need to ask ourselves:
    - i. Who are “the crucified people” in our world today? Migrants and refugees? Victims of war and violence – including domestic violence? The vast numbers of the poor globally who are becoming poorer while the rich become richer? Those already suffering from the impacts of climate change? People suffering from racism, sexism, homophobia? The homeless on our streets? Who do we identify as “the crucified people” in our lives, in our times and places?
    - ii. Have we at some level “made peace with the pain,” accepting the situations of pain around us as “just the way things are,” as too big for us to deal with? Is compassion for the people in that pain central to our lives? How could it become more central for us? What is the “**Day of the Lord**” that we long for and work for now?

- iii. Can we nourish in ourselves and in each other the kind of single-minded integrity that enabled Ellacuría to put all of his skills and resources into the service of God's reign of liberation? How would we identify that integrating single-mindedness in ourselves?
- 4. Sobrino continues: "For him [Ellacuría] it was not a question only of eliminating or alleviating poverty. Rather it was about really changing an antagonistic world, divided between the impoverished and those who impoverish others, between the victims and the executioners.... Thus the primacy he gave to justice led him to favor the type of praxis that had the greatest effect on structures." [p. 8]
  - a. Who are the people and the social institutions and policies that are creating the suffering of the crucified people we are focusing on today? Do we see the situation of these "crucified people" as a result of injustice? Are we asking the deeper questions to uncover why they are suffering?
    - i. Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil once said, "When I help the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist."
  - b. Do we see ourselves as committed to asking "Why?" To "changing an antagonistic world" of injustice?
- 5. Jesus's **parable of the talents** directs our attention to the servants' differing abilities and the ways they invest or protect the **talents** entrusted to them. It can guide our attention as well to the Salvadoran martyrs' investment of their lives and gifts and raise questions for us.
  - a. Sobrino writes that one of Ellacuría's most original and creative gifts was "his ability to imagine any personal or institutional reality in terms of its potential for the promotion of justice." [p. 9] Consider how he invested this **talent**:
    - i. **As a university president**, he asked, "How is the specific character of the university to be placed at the service of liberation in such a way that it serves liberation without doing violence to or losing its character as a university?" [p. 10]
    - ii. **His answers**:
      - 1. Generating KNOWLEDGE: coming to know the true REALITY of their situation/world: "its positive dimensions, its problems, and above all causes and solutions" through research, writing, and teaching.
      - 2. DISCOVERING and sharing how the TRUTH of reality is established and solutions emerge:
        - a. This puts processes of liberation on solid ground.
          - i. Simple enthusiasm and a good heart on one hand OR dogmatic prejudices on the other lead to grave errors.
          - ii. The powerful and oppressors suffocate truth; institutionalized lies create further dehumanization.
        - b. Attaining truth requires "passing not only **from ignorance to knowledge**, but **from lies to truth**." [p. 11]
      - 3. ACTING as a SOCIAL REALITY/FORCE HISTORICALLY: "by facilitating the transformative illumination of... the society and the people where the university is situated." [p. 12] The university should project itself as "a critical and constructive, a prophetic and utopian, conscience for society."
      - 4. ENGAGING the POLITICAL DIMENSION of the university: not just political actions that take place **at** the university; but when among its diverse functions – teaching, research and social projection – the university as institution gives highest rank to the kind of social outreach "that gives priority to the radical transformation of the established disorder of structural injustice." [Ellacuría, on p. 12]
      - 5. LIVING the CHRISTIAN INSPIRATION of the university: "decided by how the fundamental functions of the university, research, teaching, and social projection are permeated with the Christian spirit" and "the university as a whole places its social influence at the service of building the Reign of God, actualized through a preferential option for the poor." [p. 14]
        - a. Its work of KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH, AND SOCIAL PROJECTION should be intended as "the voice of those who have no voice." [p. 14]

- b. Do we try to imagine our personal or institutional realities in terms of their potential for the promotion of justice [p. 9] in our context?
    - i. For example, how can our parish, *as a parish*, serve liberation, promote justice for Christ's crucified people?
    - ii. How can our middle school or high school, *as a school...*?
    - iii. How can our university, *as a university, ...*?
    - iv. How can our Ignatian network, *as a network...*?
    - v. How can our retreat house, *as a retreat house...*?
    - vi. How can our social ministries, *as social ministries...*?
    - vii. How can our province, *as a province...*? Etc.
  - c. Gustavo Gutiérrez notes that Ellacuría avoided the temptation of embracing a quiet academic life of research and publication disconnected from his social reality. Gutiérrez writes: "There are dubious searches for the truth that are a lie from the very beginning and that therefore do no more than cover up the fears, swell the desire for personal prestige, and contribute to library catalogs." [pp. 69-70]
    - i. How do we evaluate the research being done in our universities?
    - ii. How can our criteria for advancement and tenure encourage the kind of research and publication that will serve the university's mission of liberation and social transformation?
  - d. Which of Ellacuría's insights about the contribution of the university apply to our institutions? How can we pursue them, implement them?
6. The Salvadoran martyrs invested their talents generously and courageously in spite of the dangers and threats they faced – and they paid for it with their lives. In the parable of the talents, the third servant acted out of fear, burying his/her talent to keep it "safe."
    - a. How often do fear and security play significant roles in our decisions – personal and institutional?
      - i. Do we act out of fear of public opinion? Of the hierarchy? Of authorities?
      - ii. Do we try to keep our institutions "safe," being careful not to offend donors?
    - b. Are there ways we can be more generous and courageous in investing our talents, personal, relational, and institutional, in God's work of social liberation and justice in our context?
  7. Leaving aside for this occasion the legitimate and worthwhile discussions of traditional social gender roles, the first reading from **Proverbs** on the good wife enables us to focus our attention on Julia Elba and Celina Ramos, the two women often just referred to as the companions of the Jesuit martyrs.
    - a. These two women martyrs **invested their talents** in service to the same mission/vision as the Jesuits with whom they worked and died in solidarity.
      - i. Julia Elba did the essential daily work, often unsung or even unnoticed, that supports a community and makes its other activities possible – all the work of cooking, cleaning, and community relations.
      - ii. Celina was a young high school student, a member of the next generation that would take up the vision and work of God's Reign for El Salvador.
    - b. Contemplate for a moment and pray in gratitude with and for
      - i. All the unsung and unacknowledged partners who invest their talents and gifts, sharing and supporting in the mission/vision of our universities, communities, high schools, parishes, retreat centers, social agencies, provinces, *et al.*
      - ii. All the Jesuit and Ignatian Volunteers, the Ignatian Associates, the Christian Life Communities, the members of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, *et al.*
  8. Most of the attention in these notes has focused on the vision and investment of talents of Ignacio Ellacuría. Nonetheless, this vision and investment were shared by all the martyrs, each in his or her own way. Sobrino's concern and warning early in his essay applies to each and to all of them – and is a challenge to us as individuals, communities and institutions: **We must be careful not to "pedestalize" them**: build up their image so we don't see ourselves as called to imitate them or join them in the struggle. [p. 3]
    - a. They are we. We are they.
      - i. Cook and housekeeper
      - ii. University president
      - iii. High school student

- iv. Social psychologist
  - v. Sociologist and Human rights worker
  - vi. Theology teacher
  - vii. Spiritual director and retreat director
  - viii. Educator working in schools for the poor
- b. How **have** we invested our talents for Christ's crucified people here, now?  
How **are** we investing our talents for Christ's crucified people here, now?  
How **will** we invest our talents for Christ's crucified people here, now?

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<sup>i</sup> Most of the quotations used in these notes are from "Ignacio Ellacuría, the Human Being and the Christian: Taking the Crucified People Down from the Cross" in *Love that Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría* [c2006], pages 1-67. Some are from Ellacuría himself; others from the author, Jon Sobrino. The quotation from Gustavo Gutiérrez is from his essay "No One Takes My Life from Me; I Give It Freely" in the same volume, pp. 68-72.