



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year A - Proper 27 – November 12, 2017

Photos

Last Sunday we celebrated All Saints' Day. I had the Altar Guild put out a few tables right here on the platform, and I invited anyone who wanted to bring a picture of a loved one who passed away to put photos on the tables. It was really sweet, you know, we said prayers, had Eucharist, with the photos of our loved ones.

Seeds

Of course, at the start I had to “seed” the tables, right? So I went into my office where I have a lot of photos of loved ones who have gone before, so it was easy, I came and put them on the table. Then I also grabbed this photo. A lot of people asked me if I had a relative who was a priest. I actually do have a relative who was a priest, but this photo is not of my relative.

High School

When I was in high school Guam, I went to a high school called Father Duenas Memorial School. This is a picture of Father Duenas. We went to school, and we didn't think about why it was called Father Duenas Memorial School.

Bombing of Guam and No Priests

So here's the story. A lot of people aren't aware of this, but the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, and four hours later they bombed Guam. The Japanese actually took over the whole island, and they took all the clergy and they shipped them off, because churches are great places for insurrection and things like that. But they left behind two priests, one of whom was Father Duenas, who was sort of leading the Church at that time, because there were only two priests left for the whole island during the war.

Seven Soldiers and Tweed

There were, I believe, seven American military personnel on the island who ran into the jungles when the Japanese invaded. The rest of them turned themselves in and were sent to POW camps on the Japanese mainland. Seven of them ran into the jungle, and if I have my facts right, the Japanese caught four and chopped their heads off. Then several weeks later they caught two more and shot them. But there was one who hid out in the jungle for the entire war, and his name was George Tweed.

Protection of Duenas

Father Duenas protected him, along with a lot of other people. The Japanese knew this, so right toward the end of the war they arrested Fr. Duenas. They beat him, they did their waterboarding thing, and then right as the American ships were coming in, the Japanese forces panicked and got into a frenzy and they demanded to know where George Tweed was. Even though the ships were coming in, Fr. Duenas wouldn't give up Tweed's location or the names of the people who knew where he was. So as the ships were coming in, they chopped off his head. They did that on the site where they built the school. So that's why it was Father Duenas Memorial School.

Pentecost 23 – Proper 27 – November 12, 2017, cont'd

Beatitudes

It really does remind me of that line from the Gospel that we read on All Saints Day, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Father Duenas had the courage and the conviction to do the right thing. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Father Duenas wasn’t going to turn over the names of his flock in order to save his head. But the one that really gets me is, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kind of false evil against you on my account.” Father Duenas stood for the church and he stood for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dying in Church

Father Duenas is not the first person, by the way, to lose his life as a result of representing the church, or being physically in the church. Oscar Romero, the Bishop of El Salvador, was shot by the government while he was celebrating the Eucharist at the altar. That was in 1980. A lot of people don’t realize this, but Martin Luther King Jr.’s mother was shot in church, and killed. Then several years ago, there were a group of Amish children who were in their church school and somebody went and shot them up. Then there was that church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina. They were in church and they all got shot up.

Second Sunday

Then this past Sunday, for the second time since I’ve been priest at this cathedral, I’ve had to stop the service Sunday morning and announce there has been a church shooting in this country. The second time. This happens. I don’t know why it happens, but it happens. People get shot in churches. I’m not saying it’s right, but it happens.

Thoughts and Prayers

I will also tell you that nowadays in the age of Facebook, you have a church shooting and people write “our thoughts and prayers are with you.” So now everybody’s going on Facebook and putting up the words “thoughts and prayers” and then they’re crossing them out, and they’re putting “policy and change” in their place. And I’ll tell you, every time I see that on Facebook, I cringe. Because when did “thoughts and prayers” and “policy and change” become mutually exclusive things? I really don’t understand that. Now, stopping at “thoughts and prayers”, yeah, I understand that. But eliminating “thoughts and prayers” and only going for “policy and change” would be irresponsible as Christians, and it is imperative that any policy and change for which we advocate be grounded in thoughts and prayers.

Discerning Alone?

And, when we have a thought, and when we say a prayer, and when we get a message, we discern that message in the community of prayer called the church. You never, never, never discern by yourself. Because maybe this guy went and thought and sat in prayer and got a message that said, “I’m mad as hell so I’m gonna go and kill 26 people.” And he was getting a message from a false prophet that was undiscerned by the community and he listened to the voice and went and did what it told him to. So maybe he didn’t have a community to support him.

Blaming the President

Now the other thing that really drives me crazy: I’ve got a definite political opinion. I’m not going to tell you what it is because that’s not appropriate to do from the pulpit. I go and I vote. But to sit and say that this is the President’s fault, that is low hanging fruit. Way too easy. I’ve been alive since 1965. I’ve been here for ten presidents—from Lyndon Baines Johnson to Donald Trump—and violence has happened under every single administration. Whether you’re a Republican or a Democrat or whatever, violence like this has happened under every single administration.

Pentecost 23 – Proper 27 – November 12, 2017, cont'd

Violence Without Guns – The Shadow

And I've come to believe we can take away every single gun in this country and violence will still happen until we've addressed the basic fact that every single one of us has a dark side and every single one of us has a shadow—because you cannot be a light for Christ without casting a shadow. Tell me how that is scientifically possible. You cannot. We all have a shadow side. This is something that Carl Jung expounded on in his studies of the human psyche. We all have a shadow. We all have a dark side. I've got one. I'm human.

First Thought/Second Thought

But, like I always say, we are never responsible for the first thought. But we are always responsible for the second thought. The first thought being, "I'm really ticked off at my mother in law." This is a first thought. The gunman wasn't responsible for that. "I am going to go out and get a gun and shoot up a church" is the second thought. He was responsible for that. The shadow. We have all got one. Which is why we have wars. Which is why we have the Holocaust. Which is why we have... whatever.

Community Dispels the Shadow

And that's the thing we've got to begin to confront as a community of Christ, that we have all got a shadow. And the church has a shadow. And the country has a shadow. And the world has a shadow. And Jesus is here to help us redeem that through the waters of our baptism. The thing is, it's a lot easier to go on Facebook and cross out "thoughts and prayers" and blame the President of the United States. That's way easier than saying, "Let's look at my shadow," because when I do that, I look in the mirror and I see the face of that shooter. And who knows. If I live into my shadow side, without the community to support me, without the sacrament to sustain me, I might have done the exact same thing in my anger. He went in and shot up the church because he was mad at his in-laws. He was a mad looking for a reason. And he needed a target and he found it. He took away the life of a 72-year-old, a 14-year-old, five-year-old, and an 18-month-old baby. Because there was some kind of Christ light lacking to dispel the darkness, that shadow in him.

We Have a Chance

The thing is: you and I have a fighting chance because we have each other. And we have the Eucharist. We have prayers. And think about it. If every single person on the planet, all seven billion of us, were willing to take a look at our shadow and admit we've got one, and have the humility to say, "I need Jesus Christ in my life," or "I need God in my life," and I want that light to dispel the darkness of my shadow. And if every single person on this planet did that, that's when the second coming of Jesus Christ is going to happen. This notion that it's going to be on human timeline, like in the Year Y2K Armageddon was going to happen because we decided that is when it is going to be? We tried that and it didn't happen. Pure love. That's what Christ is waiting for. So I don't think Jesus himself, so full of love, is going to be satisfied with saying, "Well, I just decided to come at this time and those of you who have it figured out, great, and the rest of you that don't, well, you're going to look at a pile of clothes of the people I've decided to take while you get left behind." I don't think so.

Let It Begin With Me

As the Body of Christ we're called to look at our shadow. And to ask the Christ light to come in and dispel the darkness of our shadow. And as you know, they have that song, "Let there be peace on earth," and what's the next line? "And let it begin with me." That's how. Until then, we've got some work to do. But for now I'm satisfied with saying, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

Amen.