

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Two weeks ago, Fr. Justin preached on the Feast of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. He started with one of Dr. King's famous quotes. *"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."*

We are all familiar with the famous words and deeds of The Rev. Dr. M. L. King, Jr., Nobel Peace Prize winner, American Baptist minister and activist who was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement for 13 years following some of the guidelines of Mahatma Ghandi. A few others of his wise words include:

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

"I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

"The time is always right to do what is right."

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

As soon as Fr. Justin began delving into the story of Dr. King, the thought came to my mind that maybe we should compare the not so crisp story of another of God's messengers, Marvin Gaye, and hold it up alongside the crisp, clean story of Dr. King. Many of you may

remember that Gaye was the victim of severe child abuse at the hands of his minister father and was shot to death by his own father in 1984 at their home in Los Angeles. Gaye was 44 years of age at that time. He recorded many songs that most people remember and can sing along with word for word: among which were *I heard it Through the Grapevine; Hitch Hike, Pride and Joy, and How Sweet it is to be Loved By You.*

In 1970, this singer, songwriter and record producer who helped to shape the sound of Motown in the 1960's, produced what I call a genius album entitled *What's Going On?*. It was released in May 21, 1971. It is a unified concept album consisting of nine songs that lead from one to the other. It is characterized as a song cycle and ends with a reprise of the album's opening theme. The album is told from the point of view of a Vietnam War veteran returning to the country he had been fighting for, and seeing only hatred, suffering, and injustice. Gaye's introspective lyrics discuss themes of drug abuse, poverty, and the Vietnam War. He has also been credited with criticizing global warming before the public outcry against it had become prominent. *What's Going On?* is regarded as one of the landmark recordings in pop music history, and one of the greatest albums of the 20th century. The album was ranked number six both on Rolling Stone's 2003 list of the *500 Greatest Albums of All Time*, and in the magazine's update nine years later. I will only discuss three of the songs but that will be enough to get the connection to the scriptural themes in today's lessons, the timelessness of his messages and the way God uses all kinds of people to spread God's messages to God's people.

[1.] What's Going on?

Mother, mother, There's far too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother. There's far too many of you dying
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today, eheh
Father, father, We don't need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer For only love can conquer hate
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today, oh oh oh

Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality Talk to me, so you can see
Oh, what's going on, What's going on
Yeah, what's going on, Ah, what's going on
In the mean time
Right on, baby, Right on brother
Right on babe, Mother, mother, everybody thinks we're wrong
Oh, but who are they to judge us Simply 'cause our hair is long
Oh, you know we've got to find a way
To bring some understanding here today
Oh oh oh Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality C'mon talk to me
So you can see
What's going on Yeah, what's going on
Tell me what's going on
I'll tell you what's going on, ooh ooo ooo ooo
Right on baby; Right on baby

[2.] Mercy Mercy Me [The Ecology]

Whoa, ah, mercy mercy me
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Where did all the blue skies go?
Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east
Whoa mercy, mercy me,
Oh things ain't what they used to be, no no
Oil wasted on the oceans and upon our seas, fish full of mercury
Ah, oh mercy, mercy me
Ah things ain't what they used to be, no no
Radiation under ground and in the sky
Animals and birds who live nearby are dying
Oh mercy,...

[3.] Inner City Blues

Dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah, dah

Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah
Dah, dah, dah
Rockets, moon shots . . . Spend it on the have nots
Money, we make it; Fore we see it you take it
Oh, make me wanna holler The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler The way they do my life
This ain't livin', this ain't livin'
No, no baby, this ain't livin'
No, no, no Inflation no chance To increase finance
Bills pile up sky high Send that boy off to die
Make me wanna holler The way they do my life
Make me wanna holler The way they do my life
Dah, dah, dah, Dah, dah, dah
Hang ups, let downs, Bad breaks, set backs
Natural fact is I can't pay my taxes
Oh, make me wanna holler
And throw up both my hands

These three songs are as pertinent today as they were in 1971. Marvin Gaye's work resounds in truth which cannot be denied. In them, we see the requirements of the Lord as detailed in Micah 6 demanded. Who can hear these songs and not realize that God is requiring us to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God? And who can explore their content and not realize that only those who lead a blameless life, does what is right, speaks truth from his or her heart is called into partnership by God.

On the eve of Black History Month and in a country where some times the contributions of African Americans are ignored or forgotten, we need to remember patriots like Dr. King who are painted with clean hearts but who we know are as human as the rest of us, and we would be remiss if we did not pay tribute to such courageous heroes as Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. But we would make a bigger mistake if we did not remember that God uses cracked pots and all kinds of people, people who have been involved in drugs, people who did not have happy home lives, people who have been abused. Just ordinary people . . . God uses ordinary people. He

chooses people just like me and you who are willing to do as He commands. God uses people that will give Him all no matter how small that all may seem to you. Because little becomes much as you place it in the Master's hands. Just like that little lad who gave Jesus all he had . . . How the multitude was fed with a fish and loaves of bread. What you have may not seem much . . . but when you yield it to the touch Of the Master's loving hand, then you will understand how your life could never be the same.

So, remember that Jesus included all kinds of people as blessed in the beatitudes: the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. Likewise, let us include as many in our circle as we can. Let us not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, education, profession, family background or social class. God has a call for each of us. God had a call for Dr. King, and God had a call for Marvin Gaye. One wanted to be remembered as the greatest artist that ever performed and the other wanted to be remembered as a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness. One won the Nobel Peace Prize and one was showered with awards and acclaim from the music world. Both loved life, nature and God.

Both agreed in the power of light and love.

One went up to the mountain and the other said there was no mountain high enough. One had a dream and one lived a life of turmoil which we could call a nightmare. Gaye said, of his father, "living with father was something like living with a king, a very peculiar, changeable, cruel and powerful king. You were supposed to tip-toe around his moods. You were supposed to do anything to win his favor. I never did. Even though winning his love was the ultimate goal of my childhood, I defied him. I hated his attitude. I thought I could win his love through singing, so I sang my heart out. But the better I became, the greater his demands."

About the environment, Gaye says, "Mother Nature will wipe out most of civilization, when she's decided she's had enough . . . When Mother Nature starts to feel a little sick, and all her oil is gone and you're

poisoning her old body with nuclear waste, then she's going to decide she feels restless and shift a little bit, and it's going to be all over. She'll only shift for a moment, but she'll do her little number. It will be the end for most people, especially those who are ill-prepared."

When you look around this country and this world and see what's going on . . . remember Marvin Gaye. Whenever you remember that war is not the answer and only love can conquer hate; send your love in right away and remember Marvin Gaye. When you look around and observe how many of our people are living under freeways and on the streets in abject poverty, I know it will make you say dah, dah dah, dah. It will make you wanna holler, throw up both your hands and remember Marvin Gaye. You will realize that he, too, was one of God's messengers. He may have been a cracked pot or a broken vessel, but you won't be able to forget Marvin Gaye because cracked pot, broken vessel or not, he is one of God's own, just as you and I are. Keep the faith, brothers and sisters. Amen.

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