

THE *New Wine* PRESS

Volume 27 No. 5 • January 2019





Let us serve God with holy joy.

-St. Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

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Cover photo: Xavier McElrathy-Bey, who entered prison at the age of 13 and served 12 years. Xavier now works for the national organization - Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. Picture taken at PBMR.

The Society of the Precious Blood is a fraternal community of priests and brothers founded by St. Gaspar in 1815. Bonded through charity by a promise of fidelity, we are prayerfully motivated by the spirituality of the precious blood of Jesus Christ to serve the needs of the Church as discerned through the signs of the times and in the light of the Gospel.

The Kansas City Province—incorporated members, covenanted companions, and candidates—united in prayer, service and mutual support, characterized by the tradition of its American predecessors, are missionaries of these times with diverse gifts and ministries. In a spirit of joy, we strive to serve all people—especially the poor—with care and compassion, hope and hospitality.

The New Wine Press seeks to remain faithful to the charism of our founder, St. Gaspar, and the spirituality of the Blood of Christ with its emphasis on reconciliation, renewal and refounding. We accept and encourage unsolicited manuscripts and letters to the editor.

THE New Wine PRESS

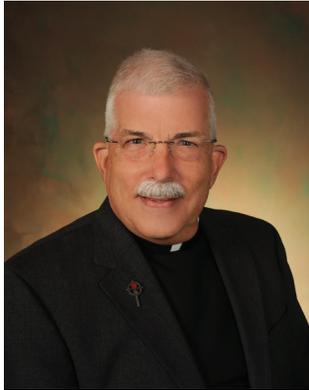
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Kansas City Province

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All is Calm, All is Bright

by Fr. Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S., Editor

As I write this, 2018 is coming to an end as we celebrate Christmas; as you read this a new year is beginning (and Christmas is still being celebrated, at least in the Church's liturgical calendar). Despite the holiday sentiment, some things don't feel very new, however. We are still in need of renewal—still often poised somewhere between hope and despair.

In 1966, Simon & Garfunkel released an album titled *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*. One of the tracks was “7 O'clock News/Silent Night”—a sound collage juxtaposing their version of “Silent Night” with a simulated news bulletin of the events of August 3rd of that year.

As we hear the duo sing the first verse of the familiar carol several times (*Silent night, Holy night, All is calm, all is bright. Round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace*) the voice of the news report assumes a greater presence through an increase in volume, until it begins to overtake the carol at the finish.

This is the early evening edition of the news. The recent fight in the House of Representatives was over the open housing section of the Civil Rights Bill. It brought traditional enemies together but it left the defenders of the measure without the votes of their strongest supporters. President Johnson originally proposed an outright ban covering discrimination by everyone for every type of housing but it had no chance from the start and everyone in Congress knew it. A compromise was painfully worked out in the House Judiciary Committee. In Los Angeles, today comedian Lenny Bruce died of what was believed to be an overdose of narcotics. Bruce was 42 years old. Dr. Martin Luther King says he does not intend to cancel plans for an open housing march Sunday into the Chicago suburb of Cicero. Cook County Sheriff Richard Ogleby asked King to call off the march and the police in Cicero said they would ask the National Guard to be called out if it is held. King, now in Atlanta, Georgia, plans to return to Chicago Tuesday. In Chicago Richard Speck, accused murderer of nine student nurses, was brought before a grand jury today for indictment. The nurses were found stabbed and strangled in their Chicago apartment. In Washington, the atmosphere was tense today as a special subcommittee of the House Committee on Un-American activities continued its probe into anti-Viet Nam war protests. Demonstrators were forcibly evicted from the hearings when they began chanting anti-war slogans. Former

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Who Does God Want?

by Fr. Ron Will, C.P.P.S., Provincial Councilor

We have begun a new year on the calendar. This will be an important year of prayerful discernment for our province as we prepare to choose a new leadership team.

When God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the future king of Israel, Samuel thought it was obvious which son was to be anointed. But each son who impressed Samuel was not God's choice as the future leader of his people. God's choice was David, the youngest son. David was just a simple shepherd taking care of the sheep entrusted to him. He was out of the limelight. But David stood up by the grace of God and became the greatest king in the Israelite memory.

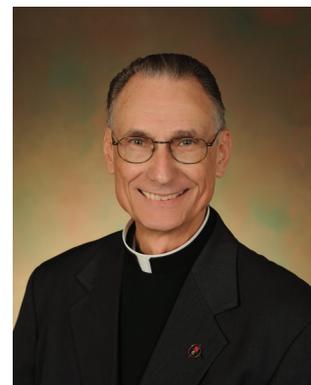
In a similar way, the first persons that come to our minds for our province leadership team may not be God's choice. Who among us is God's choice for the future leadership team? How do we get in touch with God's choice?

It is a prayerful discernment process which began in November and will conclude in April. The summaries of the discernment discussions among Companions and members are being sent out in January. Straw ballots will be sent out in February with a return date of March 1st. The results of those straw ballots will be tabulated and sent out for serious study in preparation for the actual elections during our April 29-May 2, 2019 Provincial Assembly.

Let us prayerfully engage in the process. Use our Province Discernment Prayer. Cut it out and keep it in your place of prayer and pray it daily, alone and with others. There is much value in praying the Discernment Prayer together with other members and/or Companions. There's a potential problem when groups are trying to make a big decision. They often see different pieces of the same puzzle. Discerning your path together, through prayer and discussion, allows you to figure out how to put those different puzzle pieces together successfully. Then praying on your own concretizes your support.

How do we get in touch with God's choice? Discernment is not a popularity contest. Discernment gets in touch with God's mind and heart. In his book *Weeds Among the Wheat*, Thomas Green, S.J. says that in order to have a discerning community you must have discerning persons. And

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What Does God Want?, continued from page 3

to be a discerning person you need to be a praying person. Simply put, discernment is a function of one's personal relationship with God. The more deeply one knows the Lord, the easier it will be to read God's heart and to sense what God desires us to do.

Henri Nouwen said that while discernment begins in solitude, individual seekers of God should always come together in community, for the Spirit gathers all believers into one body for accountability and mutual support. A person honestly seeking to know God's will and way will choose to search for that in community.

As we enter more deeply into our discernment process, let's keep in mind the New Creation Process which will eventually form one United States Province. Who can best lead the Province through that process? *You* bring a piece of wisdom to the table that no one else has. We all need your prayerful participation.

Discernment Prayer

Spirit poured out on us
with the blood and water
that flowed from Jesus's side on the Cross,
guide us as we discern leaders
with the vision, wisdom and skills
to draw us into a new creation.

Give us the courage
to listen to each other
and to work together
as we seek new paths
to serve the life of the Spirit.
Let the cry of the blood
keep us focused on the work
to which you have called us:
"to bring about that great order of things
which the great Son of God
came to establish in his Blood."

Amen. ✠

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Vice-President Richard Nixon says that unless there is a substantial increase in the present war effort in Viet Nam, the U.S. should look forward to five more years of war. In a speech before the Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in New York, Nixon also said opposition to the war in this country is the greatest single weapon working against the U.S. That's the 7 o'clock edition of the news. Goodnight.

Today one could substitute almost any news broadcast in the background. And many of the Christmas carols we sing would be just as jarring when juxtaposed with current events. For example, imagine the words and sounds of "Silent Night" alongside these news reports from the last several weeks and months—focusing on the plight of refugees and our country's response.

- *President Trump plans to cap the number of refugees that can be resettled in the United States next year at 30,000, his administration announced on Monday, further cutting an already drastically scaled-back program that offers protection to foreigners fleeing violence and persecution. The move is the latest in a series of efforts the president has made to clamp down on immigration to the United States, not only through cracking down on those who seek to enter the country illegally, but by making it more difficult to gain legal entry.*

- *The Trump administration is resuming its efforts to deport certain protected Vietnamese immigrants who have lived in the United States for decades—many of them having fled the country during the Vietnam War.*

- *Trump administration officials, under pressure from the White House to provide a rationale for reducing the number of refugees allowed into the United States next year, rejected a study by the Department of Health and Human Services that found that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in government revenues over the past decade than they cost.*

- *"We are a Christian nation. We should be accepting only Christian refugees," said one official at the meeting.*

- *The Trump administration has announced it will end the Temporary Protected Status designation for*

Haiti by July 2019, potentially forcing tens of thousands of Haitian immigrants to either leave the U.S. or live in the shadows.

“All is calm, all is bright” indeed. Instead, I see among some people a contempt for those trying to find refuge here. The above examples only scratch the surface. For example, fearmongering and lies about caravans of brown-skinned people (“including criminals and terrorists”) coming from Central America to “invade” our southern border played a sad and reprehensible part in the recent mid-term elections in the U.S, including the use (misuse?) of 5,000 troops to defend us from this “danger.”

I take heart and cling to hope, because this anti-refugee world view is not held by a majority of citizens of this country. We are better than this. In a recent column, I quoted part of a statement from our provincial leadership that stated, “The soul of our nation is at stake. When we treat refugees with contempt rather than compassion, our souls are at risk.” (And please be reminded that I am writing here not about legal and illegal immigrants, but rather refugees and asylum seekers; they are not the same.)

Let’s go back to the tension between the lyrics of many favorite Christmas carols and the views that some who sing them hold. I offer this recent quote from John Pavlovitz, who wrote in his blog the following:

If you’re going to rejoice over the refusal of refugee families at our borders, you probably shouldn’t be sweetly singing about a baby with “no crib for a bed.” If you have disregard for a 7-year old who expires from dehydration, I’m not sure “Let every heart, prepare him room,” should burst forth from your lips. If you’re unaffected by a tear-gassed family under an overpass, pouring water over their bloodshot eyes, I’m thinking that basking in candlelight, while singing words about reverently gathering “round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild” is a bit hypocritical. What is the point of this holiday for you, if you can’t make room in your own heart and your own nation, for the least of these when they show up unannounced?

He went on to remind his readers that Christmas carols are about a foreign child, about a weary family

looking for rest, about peace for the world coming in the least likely form, a welcome that was difficult to find, and above all about hearts that need to grow bigger in order to receive. It is imperative as well to recognize that this child would become an adult and forcefully remind us the way we welcome or ignore the least among us is the way that we welcome or ignore him.

I end with the following. After you have read it as instructed, decide which version you will choose to live by. Poised between hope and despair, may we move toward hope, believing that this new year can be new and renewed.

Refugees

by Brian Bilston

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way.

(now read from bottom to top) ♣

An illustration of a person with dark hair, wearing a white hoodie and dark pants, standing with their back to the viewer and looking out a large window. The window is divided into several panes. The background is a light blue gradient.

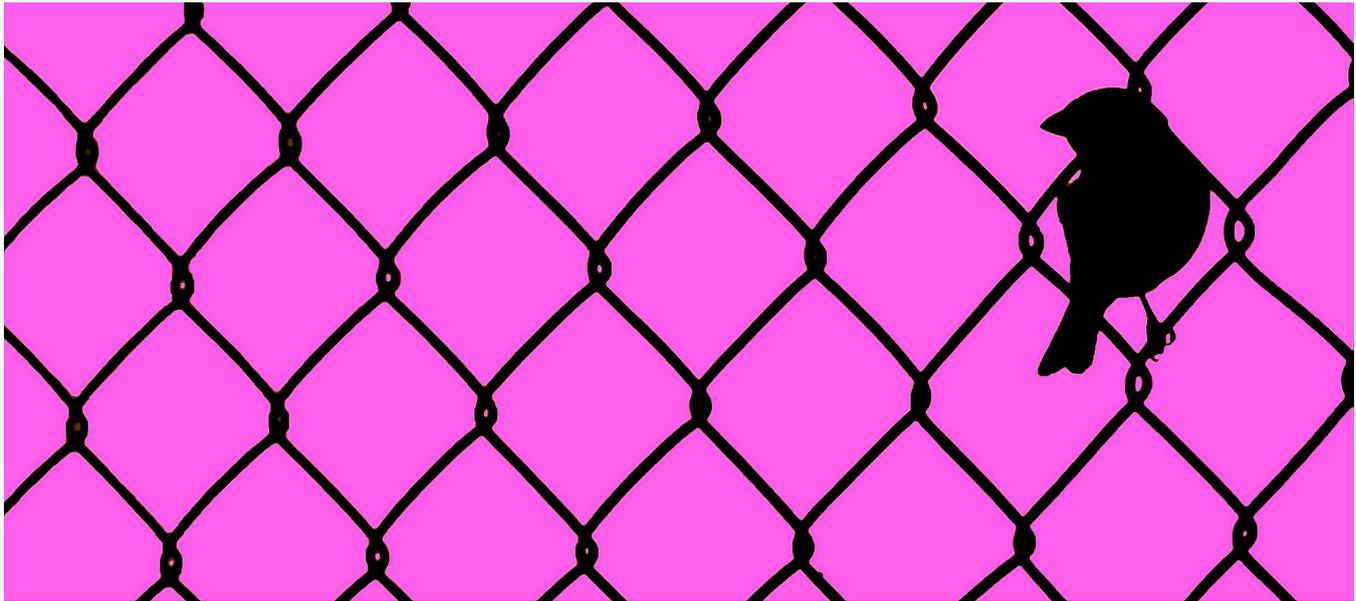
Waving Through a Window

by Vicky Otto, Director of Companions,
& New Creation Commission Member

I have written often about my love of musicals. In November, I had the opportunity to see a production of the currently popular, *Dear Evan Hansen*. At the beginning of the show, Evan sings a song called “Waving Through a Window.” There is a verse in the song that beautifully echoes our need to renew and rededicate ourselves to listen for the cry of the blood during our New Creation process. He sings, “While I watch, watch, watching people pass, waving through a window, can anybody see, is anybody waving back at me?”

Who is waving through our windows today? I had an experience recently that reminded me of the importance of this message. As the community

knows, one of our Companions, Tim Wanner, is currently serving a prison sentence in Illinois. As the Director of Companions, I try to visit all our Companions and I finally had the opportunity to visit Tim this past fall. One thing you should know is I have never been to a prison or had any experience in jail ministry. While preparing for the visit my nerves tried to get the better of me as I wrestled the reality of meeting someone for the first time, what would prison be like, how do I talk for four hours to someone I have never met—and the list went on and on. Looking back now, I realize that I could have stopped at that point and just said, “Nope, not going.” But the Spirit led me on and I went on the visit.



When you check in at the prison, you have to leave your personal belongings in a locker. I think the Spirit helped me to leave my anxieties there as well. We had a wonderful visit. I found Tim to be an interesting man who has read a lot about different subjects and is willing to engage in a lively discussion—even if our opinions didn’t match. He was kind and respectful as we both reached out in faith to form a new relationship. As I looked around the visiting room there were people of all ages and ethnicities who were also engaged in conversations with others who were in prison. There was no holding back or lack of engagement from anyone in the room. When our visit concluded and the visitors were escorted out of the room, there was a sense of sadness from everyone that this bond had to be broken once again.

For me, Tim was waving through a window, through the boundaries and barriers that we put around ourselves so people who don’t fit in our world won’t bother us. As a Precious Blood community, our spirituality calls us to stand with all those people who don’t fit in our world. As our community becomes a new creation, we are called again to remember that we have a duty and responsibility to respond to the cry of the blood. I would imagine that each of us has had those same moments of fear that I did. St. Gaspar wrote, “May our fear be filled with trust in the one who shed for us his most Precious Blood to the last drop.” The fears that we face today are different, but still as relevant as those St. Gaspar faced as he began

the community. What doesn’t change, however, is that we don’t stand alone; Christ is always walking with us. St. Gaspar wrote, “You can imagine Jesus walking in front of you in every situation, bearing his cross; or, with a chalice in hand, he has you swallow from it drop by drop.”

Our world needs the healing that the Precious Blood offers us now more than ever. We live in a time when divisions and blatant hostility have become such a norm that most people just shrug their shoulders in response. The cry of the blood calls us to respond differently. As we continue our work as a community to become a new creation, we again must ask ourselves the question, “Where does the cry of the blood call us?” What gives me great hope is that as we explore this question as a new creation we will respond with new vision, with new imagination, with fewer obstacles, and with renewed commitment to our Precious Blood spirituality.

I look forward to the work of the community as we continue to dream and envision this new creation. Where will the cry of the blood call us? My hope is that each of us through prayer and discernment listens anew. We need to see with new eyes those who stands outside the circle in our world today. Who is waving through a window? As we begin this new year, my prayer is that we will look closely through the eyes of faith and wave back. †

The Signs of the Times: History's Two Hundred Year Arc

by Dennis Keller, *Amicus*



Histories of religious communities typically begin with a statement regarding the signs of their birth-times. The charisma of a new community answers a need in the world and moves the church to making itself more relevant to the world. Specific charisms are remedies to the maladies of human endeavors. A new community's charism can be a balm to violence and the disenfranchisement of persons caused by abuse of power and/or major shifts in culture. The community of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the caring mother to members, Companions, volunteers, and Amici, is now working to refresh its response to the need for renewal today. A successfully applied response to the problems of our time (and the signs of the times) will bring new life to our endeavors.

The signs of our times are issues of social justice. Poverty is a persistent reality, more so in some places than others. The divide between the powerful/wealthy and ordinary citizens is growing exponentially. In many countries, there is a growing divisive nationalism, often characterized by violence based on classifications of persons by wealth, race, creed, gender, or gender identification. These are symptoms of our contemporary disease. Wealth is acquired by manipulation of capital rather than hard work. This shift denigrates the dignity of workers returning them to

a kind of serfdom. Work under unbridled capitalism can lead to a meaningless repetition of tasks that rob the worker of dignity, creativity, and social status. The present and coming unrest can be seen in armed conflicts, in the migration of millions of families fleeing hard or untenable living conditions, and in frequent random shootings. The ongoing ravaging of the earth and its resources destroys viable ecologies, resulting in loss of arable land and potable water. Military planners see future wars breaking out over fights for food and clean water—made scarce by the destruction of our common home. These issues must concern religious life and I think are a proper application of the charism of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

I believe that many of our troubles come from the secularization of life in culture, nationalism in national and world economies, and from the loss of values derived from the three Abrahamic world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). Our better selves were and are formed by those values. Although European feudalism embraced some of those values, feudal society no longer exists, even though ecclesial culture clings to many of its rituals and practices. The world has changed so that diversity and individual rights and dignity demand a new view of Christian practice and ritual. Moral authority has been greatly weakened by the immoral behavior of a few and amplified by the mistaken judgment of some in the hierarchy. Culture wars within the Catholic tradition provide impetus for faith-shaken folks to look elsewhere for meaning and purpose.

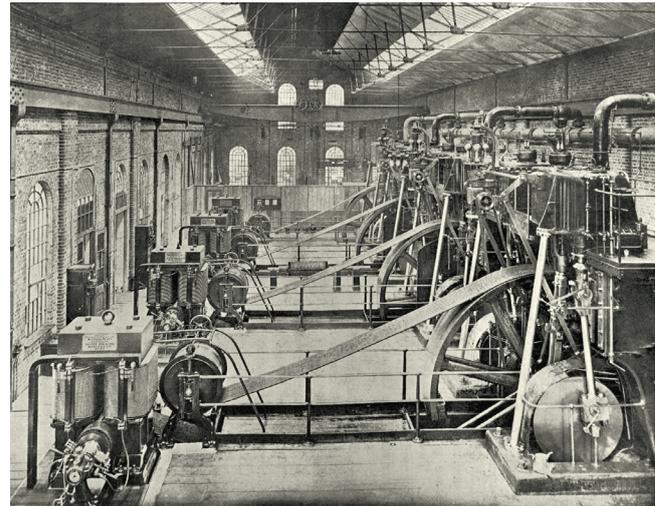
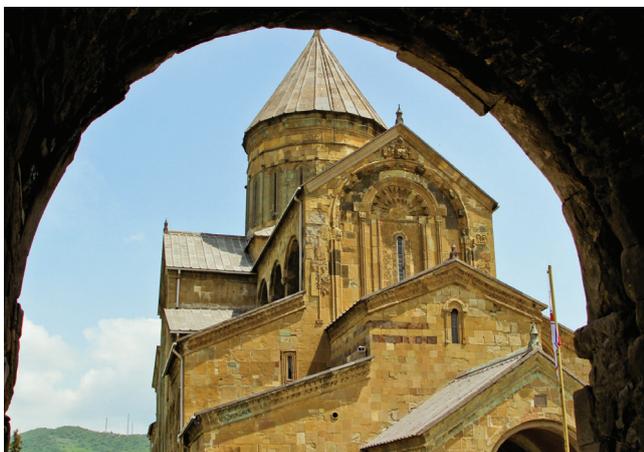
The beginnings of this crisis rose during the Age of Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason)—an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe during the 18th century. (It made its way to North America as well—the Declaration of Independence notably reflects many of these ideas.) There was significant resistance in the Church to the influences of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and modernity. The possibilities of the Age of Reason are not without challenges today. There is the

fearsome specter of technology controlling our time and an ethical threat from the misuse of Artificial Intelligence. Science has succeeded in developing weapons that can destroy all human life and that of all living beings. No wonder there has been and continues to be some push-back from Christianity against the contributions of the Enlightenment.

With greater reliance on experimentation and experience, the object of faith—God—appears less necessary. In earlier times, we looked to revelation and theological speculation for understanding our relationship to a world governed by a transcendent God. Faith was the foundation of life in medieval Europe (pre-Enlightenment). The Church could then use anathemas to keep the faithful in line, as there was a social effect that separated a person from family and community. As time passed, solid and meaningful theology left the realms of revelation and fell into a culture of ersatz piety. True piety is much more than what is often its common perception, namely, a fawning, saccharine movement of hellfire-stoked emotion.

The practiced faith of medieval culture helped to explain God—and humanity’s relationship with God, fellow humans, and nature—in terms of the relationship of lord and serf. With the Enlightenment, however, the prestige and exercised rights and privileges of lords and ladies were applied equally to all people. (“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...”)

With the loss of feudal culture and its rituals, God’s importance and transcendence began to

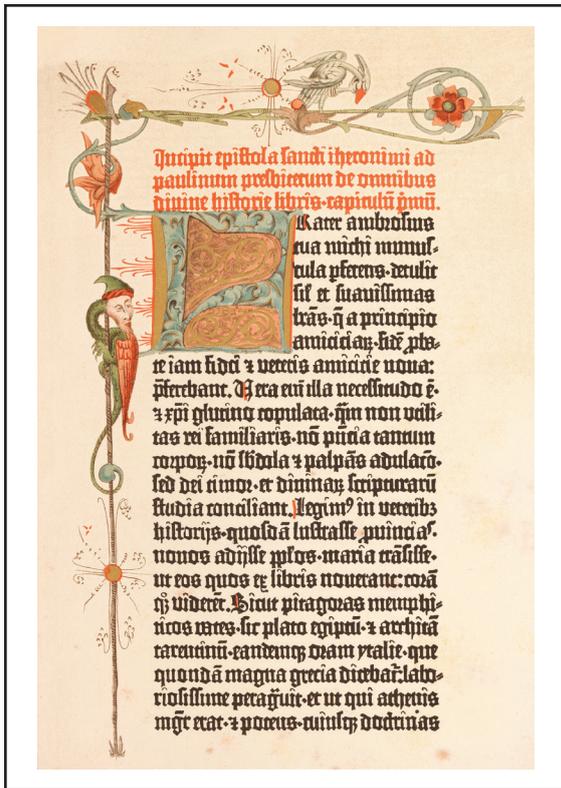


erode by the rise of science and the prosperity of the industrial revolution. Psychology, sociology, and economics brought new understandings of the relationships and endeavors of human life. With the Enlightenment, poverty, ignorance, and suffering were no longer conditions decreed by God in support of a hierarchical system. The pains of human existence became attributable to the failings of political, economic, and educational leadership. Terrible conditions could be and rightfully ought to be cured by human study and intervention. It was only a matter of time before the Cross comes to be understood not as a demand of God—the quintessential lord of the manor—for retribution; rather the suffering of the Christ is more accurately the result of the preoccupation of humanity with self. The suffering of the Cross is a statement of humanity’s failure. That failure of its cultural, political, and religious authority to achieve Divine Justice causes pain, especially to the least among us. God’s justice is not condemnatory. God’s justice is the Creator insisting that each bit of creation must have what it needs to flourish. Suffering, pain, and death are not God’s will and never have been.

How might this affect deliberations about “re-creation” of the Community? Solving the problem of community membership is also solving the problem of Church membership. Members and Amici were educated in a time when the Church was on the defensive against “Modernism.” When we approach human movements defensively, we fail to understand the opportunities its challenges offer us. In the 1950s,

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an oath against Modernism was part of the preparation for ordination. The Enlightenment led to a leveling of societal classes as exemplified by the French Revolution, and its bloodshed is remembered with justifiable revulsion. Yet the Enlightenment did move us beyond myth and legend to a fresh understanding of human life in the world, influenced by God's living presence. Denial of reason and science—especially the human sciences—were the defense against “atheistic” pressures.



As we seminarians moved through formation, many of us struggled to understand the Scriptures as a special sort of history, less dependent on a timeline than on a journey of development of relationships with a God who chose to be actively present in human history. We were encouraged in our study of church history with an attitude of triumphalism that led to a defense of all ecclesial activities—and errors. Spiritual life focused on devotion. Human experience was viewed as without impact on faith or religious practice. A new understanding of the development of doctrine seemed strangely different if not bordering on heresy. Any thought of an expansion of understanding of revelation was thought heretical. After all,

we had been taught that all revelation ceased with the death of the last apostle. The Enlightenment brought an ecclesial reaction which saw infallibility (and ultimately Papal Infallibility) as the defense against rationalism. Pentecost brought us an Advocate capable of inspiring the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) and the college of bishops under the direction of the successor of Peter. It is then the Pope's responsibility to confirm the faith of ecclesial leadership and of all the People of God.

A question may occur to those who read this, “Why are you concerned about the Community?” Since leaving the priesthood, I continue searching for answers. I am very much in love with the Church. And I will never forget or abandon the Community that formed my faith. The majority of us (Amici) continue our efforts for the Church—whether in the Roman tradition or others. What we've contributed is without fanfare but nonetheless springs from our formation—and from (at least from those who have followed the movement of the Community) the renewed spirituality of the Precious Blood that presents a more realistic understanding of the Way of God as non-violent, embracing the wonder of every individual. In such a context, the Justice of God is about the mind and heart of the Divine which loves every (even miniscule) part of creation, teeming with life and dependent upon and influenced by every other part. May your efforts for renewal and relevance in the contemporary world be abundantly successful! ✠



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Ignorant Bliss

by Lina Guerrero, Precious Blood Volunteer



It was around 7:00 a.m. on October 10, 2011 in Austin, Texas. I was seventeen years old and sitting outside on the porch of my house with our pastor Fr. Bill Wack, C.S.C. It was a Monday morning, the usual

day when the trash collectors come. I remember sitting there in silence with Fr. Bill watching the world go by and the workers going about their day trying to make their living. The collectors reached my house and just passed by, because we hadn't put the trash bins out. They went along, but we stayed there, sitting still. I turned to Fr. Bill and said to him, "It's weird how they just go about their day, and they have no idea what's going on in this house or why our trash bins aren't on the curb." He just looked up, smiled, and said to me, "Yeah, it's almost like an ignorant bliss."

About an hour before this scene, my aunt—affectionately known as Tia Mari—had died after a long five-month stint in hospice care in my home. She had been battling breast cancer for a long time, and that moment on the porch after her painfully long death was filled with a crippling sense of anger, sadness, relief, and confusion. How can people like those trash collectors go about their day when we're sitting here with our world rocked by the death of our loved one? How can the world go on when we're sitting here still, feeling like we can't move, or even breathe? I remember feeling angry about this realization, specifically because the world and the people in it move every day in the "ignorant bliss" of so much death and suffering.

Fast forward to December 5, 2018. I'm sitting in the large gathering room at Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation (PBMR) in Chicago, Illinois. There is a heaviness and stillness in the place, much like

that morning on the porch, and I'm feeling that same sense of anger all over again, except this time it is for a very different reason. That morning we woke up to the news that one of the young men in our programs was killed during the night. He was 21 years old, and appeared rather frequently at the center. I interacted with him occasionally, but not enough to know him on a personal level. However, many people at the center knew him very well for many years. This young man is the latest PBMR family member to die—and unfortunately death is known very well here. The reality of death is with us every day, almost as if we are constantly waiting for it to happen, but hoping and praying that it doesn't.

For as long as I can remember, I have always had a weird relationship with death. During my year as a Jesuit Volunteer in Kansas City, I remember crying in the middle of a bar with my spiritual director while talking about the spirituality of death. Every time I hear that someone has died, I sort of get a sense of numbness. And if I'm being honest, I don't know if this numbness comes from me having multiple experiences of people close to me dying, or if the concept of death just scares the hell out of me.

So why do I currently volunteer/work at a place where death is a common occurrence? I ask myself that question every day. But if there's anything I can say, I think it comes from the fact that it's one thing to die from an illness, a car accident, or natural causes—things that we have no control over—but a completely different thing for someone to die from violence, a cause that can, should, and could have been prevented by various measures. The deaths we encounter most at PBMR are deaths of the latter kind—deaths that because our society is structured and conditioned to value some lives more than others, rock communities and individuals to their very core.

But like that morning on the porch and that morning at the Center, the anger at the ignorance of death—whether or not it is intentional ignorance—makes me feel some kind of way. I think of the way

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Beyond Pain

By Dave Kelly, C.P.P.S., PBMR Director

I called Michael, a Jesuit seminarian who worked with us last year and was very involved in the media lab, helping young men craft their lyrics and beats. I told him that one of his youth, Nate, was killed last night. Michael is now living out west and recalled how Nate had touched him deeply.

Nate was a mainstay here at PBMR. He was loud and, being so tall, could intimidate people at times. His music, even when it didn't conform to the values of PBMR, was his expression—how he communicated his feelings, his life experiences.

After hanging up the phone, Michael sent me this article that he had written about PBMR and his experience with Nate.

It was Tuesday afternoon on the Southside of Chicago. I was helping a very talented 17-year-old named Nate record a freestyled rap in the Restorative Justice Center where I was working as a Jesuit. Nate stepped into the booth and began freestyling. As he rapped, it seemed he was no longer just describing violence, but promoting it. I was upset. I stopped the instrumental track in the middle of his freestyle and asked him, "Nate, how many times do we have to go over this? Don't you see the contradiction between what you are promoting and our mission to foster peace and justice through music here at the Center?"



Looking at me with a combination of anger, frustration, and sadness, he paused and responded, "Michael, I don't know peace. I don't know justice. How do you

expect me to rap about something I don't know?" I had no answer. I stopped for a moment and just gazed at him. Silence. Everything I thought of responding seemed unsatisfactory.

I asked the Holy Spirit in that moment to illuminate my response. After a period of silence, I said, "You are right, Nate. You don't know peace. You don't know justice. But that is what we are here to do, to discover and experience that peace and justice together every time you walk into this lab and are loved as you are, every time you speak your truth prophetically into that microphone and share your story."

The world cries out daily for healing and reconciliation. That is what my vocation story is about—learning to walk with and be present to both the wounded and resurrected Christ in my daily life.

One of the hardest things for us to do is bury one our youth who had been so much a part of our PBMR family. To sit with the mother and try to make sense out of what is senseless, bonds one to the other in the reality of the moment. The pain of life ending—especially of one so young—hurts. It is in these moments that we cling to and embrace a spirituality that sees beyond the pain and woundedness to the hope promised in the resurrection.

We recently had an opening at our art center—Art on 51st—titled "My First 24 Hours." It was a photography exhibit of men who had returned home after decades behind bars. Br. Juan Acuña agreed to take the photos of 18 men who spent between 15 and 35 years in prison. All of them entered as teenagers and spent many of their most formative years incarcerated. Each man, now home, was asked to write a reflection on his first 24 hours of freedom. They shared stories of being picked up at the prison gate, of eating their first meal, and the overwhelming sensation of seeing the burst of colors as they drove home (prison is pretty much without color).

Each reflection spoke of the long journey of incarceration, made more difficult by the harshness of prison. The reflections carried stories of how they

maintained hope that one day they would be free. They wrote about all those along the way who supported and lifted them when they were at their lowest, of how they kept their dreams alive, praying that one day they would be home. The stories of these men carry the Precious Blood spirituality that recognizes the pain and struggle—and yet clings to the hope that has been promised us since the beginning.

We will, no doubt, experience more violence and disappointment here at PBMR. But we will also continue to rely on the sure knowledge that within those struggle lies hope.

May you know peace in this new year. ✝



Picture above: Participants in the art opening. In total they served over 300 years in prison.

Back row, left to right: Marshan Allen, Fred Weatherspoon, Larod Styles

Front row, left to right: Wendell Robinson, Charles Johnson, John Horton

Larod, Charles, and John were all wrongfully convicted

Picture to the left: Joey Rodriguez, who served 35 years in prison. He entered at age 15 and came home at 51 years of age.

Ignorant Bliss, continued from page 10

people are killed in the streets every day, and people go about their lives as if it doesn't matter. Jesuit Father Greg Boyle of Homeboy Industries has said, "The wrong idea has taken root in the world. And the idea is this: there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives." How many people in our society would ask whether the young man who died was a gang member? A Black man? Someone who lived on the south side of Chicago? Why was he walking late at night? Did he deserve to die even if all of those things were true? These are the questions that I've been asking myself since that morning. And I can definitely tell you that according to the many people who knew this young man here at PBMR, he didn't deserve to die. His life mattered, even if the ignorance of others says otherwise.

I'm going to be straight up and say that I don't have any answers to what I speak of here. But what I do know is that I'm tired of living in a world where we have to convince people to care about others, to pay attention to their own privilege, to not be in their own "ignorant bliss" about the lives of others due to the perception that some lives matter more than others. I get angry a lot about these things now-a-days, and I think that's okay. Jesus got angry and flipped tables too. But also like Jesus with Lazarus, He made space to honor the anger of Martha, to weep and mourn the death of His friend. And even though we know that death doesn't have the final word, the anger, the weeping, and lamentation are holy too. And that's where I want to be. ✝

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