

The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



June 15, 2016

A Pastoral Reflection After the Murders in Orlando

"There was silence in Heaven...." (Revelation 8:1)

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I finished the newspaper on Monday morning, I wondered: *is there grief in Heaven?*

We are told there is not. At many wakes and funerals for those killed in Orlando, those who mourn will be told *your loved one is in a better place; she is dancing in heaven; he is laughing with the angels.*

Of course, I understand why such things are said, but I think they are not enough.

I see and hear a rather different scene: silence in heaven, stilled harps, muted angelic voices, the saints with their faces in their hands, hearts broken open once again, for those who died, those who mourn, those caught in the midst of a violent and broken world – yes, grief even for the killer and his illness. In their silence, their hearts go out to us.

If we could borrow their eyes for a few minutes, be silent and grieve with the angels and saints, what would we see as we looked at ourselves? Perhaps a few things.

We would see that the LGBT community, in spite of recent gains in civil rights, is still vulnerable; viewed as diseased and criminal in many parts of the world and frequently treated as objects of derision in our own. We would see the darkness they bear that we have put upon them.

We would clearly see the various ideologies of hate for what they are, a web of lies that pit the strong against the weak and tear apart human lives in the false quest for an Eden of our own making. We would see little difference between the extremes of Islamic fundamentalism in many countries, or the current temptations to demagoguery in our own.

We would see the renewed debates about gun control, constitutional rights, immigration, and the like, perhaps as addressing (for good or ill) a set of current problems, but not getting at The Problem.

We would understand that The Problem is this: *We fear our own death more than we love the lives of others.*

Because we fear, we put our sins on someone else's head. We push them away. We kill in the hope we will finally find peace.

But the saints, in their silence, *know* what we can only *believe*: the peace we are looking for has been won in the Cross of Christ. No further sacrifice is needed or allowed. No scapegoat. No enemy.

And the Lord's Resurrection has done away with the fear of death, if we will only believe it, and has supplied us with an endless well of love out of which to love others, freely, joyfully – even to love them more, the more they would do us harm.

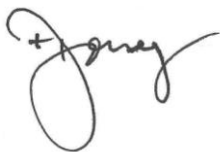
That is why the silence in heaven, sooner or later, ends. The harps are picked up again, the voices tuned, the faces of the saints lifted to the glory of God. Soon will come the *new heaven and the new earth*, when all sorrow will end. Then both the dead and those who mourned for them will be raised, *and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev. 21:1-4)*

And for us, in the meantime? How might we show others the same heart God shows us through our communion with His saints in heaven?

We pray for those who mourn, pray for an end to our own violence, the warring of our own hearts. Pray without ceasing for the world. Embrace our LGBT sisters and brothers. Support their community with the assurance of our love for them and with deeds that reflect that love. Especially in this tempestuous election year, walk in love and refuse to be drawn into the politics of fear. Work, in any way we can, to overcome the culture of violence through actions that bring peace.

Finally, remember that we are always surrounded by a *great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1)* whose hearts go out to us constantly. Be filled with the Spirit to open our hearts to others, to mourn with those who mourn, build with those who build, until all grief is ended by the One who *makes all things new. (Rev. 21:5)*

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

(The Rt. Rev.) Dorsey W. M. McConnell, D.D.
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh