

The Violence in Parkland

Dear friends in Christ,

Parkland. The name has now entered our national glossary of sorrow. It is all too familiar, and yet, in a way that will haunt us, unique. The massacre coincided with Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day. Love, blood and ashes. Calvary, again.



From Columbine to Parkland we have witnessed something terribly wrong with American culture, breaking out into the intentional and focused slaughter of our children; in the end, and in spite of active movements to change laws and limit the spread of weapons among ill and unstable people, the result after nearly 20 years has been little more than frustration on one side and resistance on the other.

What we are dealing with is not merely a political matter that can be resolved through national debate. It is an idolatry that demands national repentance, a spiritual cancer that has captured the souls of countless Americans of all parties and political persuasions, and that is metastasizing rapidly: namely, the belief that the rights of individuals take precedence over the collective good.

There are both progressive and conservative versions of this false deity, but the result is the same: tribalism, hatred of those who differ, self-will on a national scale, our easy willingness to project our darkness onto another and seek their destruction. The murderer always seeks relief in the death of his victims.



This is Moloch, the destroyer of children, well-known to the prophets of Israel. When every person does what is right in their own eyes, when our own version of God, made in the image of our own ideals and appetites, is adored within our own cult of the like-minded, then the center is broken. The call of God to live together is ignored in favor of our right to gather in fragmented assemblies paying homage to a mirror *on every high hill and under every green tree* (Jeremiah 2:20). We reject the claims of others upon our lives, and insist rather that they make room for us. Saint Paul's counsel, as essential to democracy as it is to the Church, that we *look not to our own needs but to the needs of others, counting one another better than ourselves* (Philippians 2:3-4), is scorned in favor of the aggressive pursuit of our own desires. And those who, as a result, take it in the

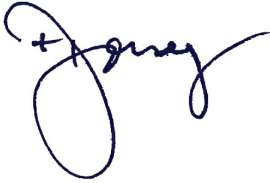
neck, are always the weak, the poor, the oppressed, and yes, children.

We know that Parkland will happen again. We also know it is happening every day all around us, but in neighborhoods that don't get much attention: Homewood, Wilkinsburg, and places such as these, where children kill children and no one thinks to put their pictures on the front page of the *New York Times*. If we really want such horrors to end, we need to recognize our enchantment, repent and turn to God's vision of true community. Yes, there will be political necessities as we do so, but none of this will be possible without the reform of our hearts.

And in the meantime, where is God? Where was God in the classrooms and corridors of

Parkland? Where God always is, crying out to us in the blood of the innocent who were killed simply because we did not have the will to prevent it, calling our attention once again to the Cross of Jesus Christ. There, the one innocent sacrifice was made that reveals as blasphemy any attempt to repeat it, the sacrifice that renders judgment against all the false gods of this world. From there, and in Christ's name, we are called to pray and work and witness in the power of the Spirit, until knowledge of the Lord's mercy and justice finally make us one people, that we and our children may live.

Faithfully your bishop,



(The Rt. Rev.) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.



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