

THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE OF THE MARTYRS OF THE AMERICAS

The best definition of the martyrs is witnesses of Jesus Christ. All the martyrs are characterized as having been obedient even unto death. The martyrs didn't opt for martyrdom, rather God called them and chose them in order to give testimony of the example of His Son Jesus Christ.

The martyrs give testimony by following the example of Jesus. They give testimony to him through their works and they give testimony to the Holy Spirit. The martyrs belong to all churches and communities of faith opting for a Theology of Life that realizes a ministry in special attention to those most in need.

This martyrial church has as its sign the cross and I call it a martyrial church because all men and women of good will belong to it: those who walk in community, love in community, serve in community and suffer in community.

IT IS A CHURCH IN WHICH MARTYRDOM LEADS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROPHETIC MINISTRY

With the prophetic proclamation of the Word, the Word presents the plan of salvation and through it, announces the holistic love of God in all its forms, denouncing sin and injustice.

It is a holistic prophetic message of Word, the testimony of life, testimony of death and of Resurrection.

The Word of God is re-clothed with power over oppressive structures and constructs hope for the poor. The participation of the poor has empowered and enriched the prophetic ministry of the Church, discovering hidden treasures in the narrations of the Gospels.

Through it, in the light of the suffering and the poor there is a re-reading of the Word of God. The Church finds in the poor a source where God is revealed and is involved in struggle, strength and resistance.

From this prophetic ministry of the Word, the Word as liturgical proclamation is also born, the prophetic and poetical sense that feeds even more when life is threatened and produces liturgical expressions, symbols, signs, phrases, prayers, poems, canticles and hymns. It is a liturgy that originates in joy and inspires in order to strengthen and give hope.

PROPHETIC DIACONAL SERVICE, THE SECOND PRACTICAL ACTION OF THE MARTYRIAL CHURCH

It is prophetic diaconal service, that is to say, faith in action and the concretization of the Gospel. It is also the liberating, transforming, ecological and ecumenical Word made action.

Jesus was a deacon as were the apostles and martyrs. The history of diaconal service defends the dignity of each person and illuminates a process for the construction of a better future. It is a

mission that helps to train the communities so that its members develop their gifts of service.

In poor countries, prophetic diaconal service has developed greatly. It is vital and necessary action. In this way, the churches, upon being confronted with the pain of the people, have developed a strong service of accompaniment which hasn't always been understood. The churches that serve in this way are accused of dedicating themselves exclusively to social work. But it is truly the society which requires this work and brings to birth a strong commitment to service because it is in this way that the hunger and desperation of the people who lack basic necessities is seen and felt.

In El Salvador, we work accompanying the people and it is our thought and feeling that diaconal service comes from the altar. It is Word of God given to the Church and its manifestation is in the spirit of love and solidarity.

The thread of the martyrial church is connected to the prophetic Word (kerygma) and prophetic diaconal service with the communion or koinonia is this: God is: God with the Human Being, the Human Being with God and the Human Being with the Human Being. The communion in faith, in the Word and the Sacraments is transcendental in the unity of Christians and is the base which guarantees the presence and eternal permanence of the Church.

In the same way, an ecumenical spirit arises that is spiritual and social communication, clearly born of pain and hope.

This ecumenical spirit has united the social work of the historical churches. Human necessities were stronger than doctrinal or confessional differences and even furthered the opportunity of an encounter between the churches.

And so the martyrial church is ecumenical in a practical and not a theoretical way. The communion or koinonia for the defense of life, offers its life just as the Lord Jesus Christ offered His life for humanity in the same way that the Church that arose, is born from the cross.

MARTYRDOM

This characteristic comes from the origins of the Christian movement. It is the walk of the Church that has remained permanent in all generations. The cross is an inescapable step. It is the river that must be crossed in order to get where one wants to go.

In the Old Testament, martyrdom is initiated by the prophets, carried on by Jesus Christ, passes on by the apostles and is continued in the testimony of the disciples in the distinct epochs of the history of the Church.

In Central America, martyrdom has been one of the frameworks of the Church. Blood has been spilled in torrents. Leaders of different ministries of the Church have been sanctified and this is a sign of historical judgement. But martyrdom has been with all the national and international faith community. That is to say that not only the assassinated have been the victims but rather the

whole of the Church. The entire Church has been slandered, persecuted, made into refugees and exiled.

The Church also has been formed by the cloud of witnesses that are the living martyrs that have maintained the historical blessing of God that defines the Church as a martyrial church. One could define the universal Church of Jesus Christ as: one holy catholic, apostolic, martyrial church.

MARTYRDOM OF THE FOUR NORTH AMERICAN CHURCH WOMEN

1980 was a year of martyrial pain, which is also recognized in the testimony of Monsignor Romero and that of the Jesuits. To celebrate and remember the 4 North American women martyrs offers to El Salvador the possibility of valuing justice and truth.

It is to celebrate solidarity that is born of faith and makes us live the testimony of being one family where servants of God exist, capable of offering life so that the humble might have a future with better conditions of life.

The memory of the four North America church women has been converted little by little into a symbol that demands justice for the thousands of assassinated victims, for the disappeared, for those who suffer torture, for those in social struggles, and for the families of the victims with wounds that continue to be open.

The massacre of the four North American church women is a political crime and for that reason, a way must be found to reopen the case and oppose the interests of those who would like to classify it as a common crime.

On March 20, 1992, punishment and judicial condemnation for the guilty was avoided with the amnesty law which favored impunity for the assassins.

However, the International Code of Human Rights establishes the judicial responsibility to open a new process to investigate all that occurred. This is the right to the truth.

Based upon the International Code of Human Rights, it is necessary to require knowledge of the truth in new investigations that prove the participation of the material and intellectual authors and their accomplices. El Salvador can't deny this: to carry out the necessary investigations in order to value the rights of the family members to know the truth. El Salvador is a signer of the American Convention of Human Rights which states that "Every society has the irrenouncible right to know the truth of what occurred as well as the reasons and circumstances under which these abhorrent crimes came to be committed in order to avoid that the same acts might occur in the future."

In El Salvador as in other Latin-American countries, there has been a search for a way to legalize impunity. In Argentina, it is called the "final point and required obedience." The intention is to close the possibility of continuing judicial processes that will identify material and intellectual

actors and punish or condemn them as they merit it.

The twenty-fifth anniversary is the celebration of the resurrection and is a memory not to be forgotten. It is for renewed commitment that the truth will shine and that justice will be done.

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