

Be a Light in the Hart of Darkness

Sr. Helen Prejean has given her life to challenging the death penalty; her story given expression in the movie, *Dead Man Walking*. She tells the man who brutally murdered two young people, as he "walks" his final journey to the chamber of execution, that she wanted the last face he saw to be the face of Love. Sr. Helen was the "light, dispelling the darkness," just as Christ began his ministry in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, which marks the division of Israel and the reality foreign domination, as a "great light on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by darkness...light has arisen."

Sr. Helen saw something in a convicted criminal which no one else could see: a child of God. The call of Christ at the Sea of Galilee is a call to see beneath the surface "sea of humanity" a Presence in each human being that remains hidden, sometimes in mystery and sometimes in sin.

Jesus calls them to use their skills, transferable ones, to "catch" people in the net of God's love. He "calls" them to see in life and humanity hidden potential and possibility. It is gospel irony that they, as fishermen, were trying to catch fish "hidden" beneath the surface waters, swimming by the thousands and now they were called to catch "fish" plainly visible to the human eye, but who had a hidden mystery that human eye could not detect. The eye of faith must see through the Light who is Christ. Jesus wants the disciples he calls...us...to be the face of Love that people see. Love sees in people what they most likely cannot see in themselves. But in order for us to be a face of Love, we have to "see" ourselves as beloved by God. To be the face of Love means that we, ourselves, must have encountered Christ deep in the heart of our spirit. We cannot give or reflect something which we don't have. A painful Truth.

When Jesus began his ministry, he went into the heart of darkness, the place of division, to be the Light of reconciliation and peace. Jesus certainly "rolled up his sleeves," and got his hands and feet dirty from the get go. We are called to do the same...to enter the heart of darkness, beginning with our own personal darkness. We have to face the darkness within, our own sin, addiction, fear, selfishness, so that the Light may free us to live as a child of the Light. Oh, how the waters of baptism, the Spirit, wants to burst out of our inner darkness!

The Light shining in darkness must occur in the Church, the people of God, and how much the darkness of hidden and covered up sin and crime seems to permeate the visible structures of the institution of the Church.

Yet again, our Church is in the news in a most painful and shameful way. As I stand here and apologize, I know you are weary and disgusted by what has been revealed: the various correspondences and letters from Cardinals Cody, Bernardin and George that expose a hidden culture that tried to protect the image of the Church by sheltering predators.

Yes, the Light must shine in the darkness, as painful as it is, so that we can truly become the face of Love. The clerical culture of the institution must be more than reformed, it must give way to a new way of ministering and governing, one that includes clergy, women, men, both single and married, reflecting the beautiful diversity that *is* the Church of Jesus Christ.

We have much to learn from Sr. Helen: to be the face of Love means facing the darkness.