

“Black Lives Matter”

A Stumbling Block or a Door Into the Gospels? (One priest's reflection)

For many months now we have seen across our news media people carrying signs with **Black Lives Matter** printed on them. Other signs have also begun to appear saying **All Lives Matter**. At times these signs are viewed as opposites and enemies, setting up a no win result without understanding the issues underneath.

This past Sunday we had the reading from Exodus that confronted the people of Israel for their behavior. God said: “You shall not molest or oppress the immigrant or the refugees (aliens)...You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If you ever wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry....If the poor cry out, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.”

Jesus echoes the same theme in the Gospels: he welcomes & dines with sinners; he lets the prostitute anoint his feet; he converses with the Samaritan woman; he shocks people and goes to Zaccheus' home; he highlights the poor, the cripples, the disabled and those on the fringe; and he tells the story of the Prodigal Son being welcomed back home with a feast.

If you put Jesus' comments and parables in context of today's culture, Jesus is verbally saying: **These Lives Matter**. Many Pharisees and scribes, and the well-to-do did not include these people, the poor, the sinners, the disabled, and the neglected in their faith or cultural circles. Verbally & by their actions and attitudes they carried signs that said: **the poor, the sinners, the disabled are not wanted**. When Jesus singled out the poor and others for attention, the Pharisees & Scribes were upset and deemed themselves as not given enough attention.

Jesus like His Father emphasized the dignity of all people & he stressed “you love your neighbor as yourselfAnd you love one another as I love you.” When people were left out of the larger picture, Jesus addressed the issue straight on so it could be corrected and justice be carried out.

But, the Pharisees and Scribes and others reacted with hate and resentment because they did not listen or enter into the heart of Jesus & His Father. Jesus says they were blind and had huge beams in their eyes; but, they did see the specks in the eyes of the fringe people.

I am a part of a Caucasian race and culture that takes things for granted. I have a great education foundation & my family had enough money to have a nice home in a great neighborhood of St. Ann's, Mo. I am not prejudiced against; I have all the freedoms I need to have a full and happy life. But, I have discovered over the years that many people of different races and cultures have not been able to partake in the same benefits that I have taken for granted. Many people of color have not had the opportunities or the support that we call normal.

But, the Gospel calls me to (as St. Margaret Mary Alacoque says) “lose myself in the heart of Jesus”. When I do that, I see the injustices that are carried out in our Church and our nation & like Jesus I need to respond as he would with his insight, with his understanding, with his perseverance even to be rejected and laughed at as many Pharisees & Scribes did in his time.

Jesus is speaking in our time and our age through His Church and our Church is carrying the signs: **Black Lives Matter, that Unborn Lives Matter, The Lives of Refugees & Migrants Matter, the Poor Lives Matter**. These are not opposed to each other, but cut from the same cloth. If we only say, “**All Lives Matter**”, then we miss the pain and brokenness that Jesus is pointing to.

To forget, to neglect, to oppress one set of persons, you lessen the dignity of all. To stand up for and fight on behalf of one set of persons, you unite yourself to Jesus who embraces all of His People.