

I Have a Dream Homily

August 31, 2013

Preached by: Fr. Paul G. Mast at St. Ann's Church in Bethany Beach, DE.

I was in Washington, D.C. this past week for the 50th anniversary celebration of the March on Washington. I didn't go to hear the President, political leaders or celebrities use the occasion to grandstand and listen to the sound of their own voices with speeches that in no way could improve on Dr. King's legendary "I have a dream speech." I went, instead, to relive the event and recall what I saw unfold that day watching it on a black and white Zenith TV screen.

Last Tuesday I walked along the National Mall savoring those memories. I sat at the King Memorial for over an hour reading and pondering the text of his speech which I carried with me. Then I looked up and contemplated an enormous piece of white stone with the life size figure of Dr. King stepping out of a mountain of rock opening the way for people to pass through in the likeness of the great biblical liberator, Moses. He seemed to come alive and talk to me. The more I listened with my heart the more I heard this prophet of the Civil Rights Movement say to me: *"Welcome Paul. Thanks for coming. Thanks for savoring my words again on this sacred ground. Now I want you to write down your own dreams and share them with others. Write them as a testament of the convictions of your heart rooted there by your love and devotion to the cause of biblical justice etched in the gospel of life."* So, I started doing that then and there. The result is this **"I have a dream homily."** I hope it inspires you to write down your own dreams as a piece of the legacy of your life you can leave behind for others to follow. In the words of the philosopher John Rosten, *"You know you've been in the presence of a Christian by the trail of light they leave behind."*

Dr. King certainly did that for me fifty years ago. It was not electric light that he turned on in me. It was more spiritual light, released by the rays and shards of gospel hope that got out of him and sparked new light in me. That is the mission of a prophet, namely, to be the mouthpiece of God's hope for others: to charge and recharge the People of God with divine breath and renewed life.

This Southern Baptist prophet did that for me fifty years ago in two ways. First, by awakening me to how racial prejudice diminishes the quality of life before death because it steals energy that does not recycle the human spirit and second, by challenging me to put a human face on tolerance, freeing it as a word in a dictionary and giving it new meaning and purpose in my converted behavior. So, following the spark of his prophetic words, my heart wishes to say:

Today, I have dreams that are colored differently from the social and political landscape from which Dr. King's dreams were born and uttered like the oracle of a prophet on August 28, 1963.

They are dreams, sometimes hammered by the anvil of the rhetoric of despair and the polarizing climate of our democratic model of governance nearly killing within me the sacred voice which quietly whispers the eternal truth that unearned suffering is redemptive.

These harsh and sometimes bullying voices come close to smothering my greater and more reverent dreams that, things can and will change as long as I do not wallow in what Dr. King called, the "valley of despair."

So, today I once again take back my heart from despair and set my sights on the mountain of hope, looking upwards to the heavens where dreams are wider and hope is brighter. It is where more of God gets into us expanding our hearts to contain God's dreams.

And so, I say to you today, People of God, I have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the dream of a God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is a dream born of God who formed a people, liberated them from slavery, journeyed with them in deserts, exiled them for their stubbornness, welcomed them back after they were made humble and then wrote a new covenant on their hearts. This dream is God's dream for humanity.

I have a dream that this nation, born of the hand and providence of that God and tested in a war where our founding citizens revolted against oppression, was reborn to constitute itself by writing it's new covenant in conviction and bloodshed, "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed with the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*" I have a dream that one day our nation birthed in these words written in the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence will inspire voices to extol this dream above all constitutional amendments which are antecedent to this dream of our founding ancestors.

I have a dream that, fifty years after Dr. King's dreams, Afro-American children from the south and white children from the north, Muslim children from the suburbs of Detroit, and Native American children from the western plains, will join with Hispanic children from the sunbelt and with oriental children from the Pacific coast and attend schools and colleges where courses on TOLERANCE are not an elective but a requirement.

I have a dream that in my lifetime a black woman will choose to give birth to the next Marian Anderson, the next Louis Armstrong, the next Flip Wilson, and the next Whitney Houston who brought tears to my eyes with her stirring rendition of the National Anthem at the 2007 Super Bowl Game. I have a dream that I live long enough to see their faces and hear their voices against the pantheons of these talented giants.

I have a dream that in my lifetime a white woman will choose to give birth to the next Abraham Lincoln, the next Eleanor Roosevelt, and the next Bill Gates.

I have a dream that in my lifetime a Hispanic woman will choose to give birth to the next Dezi Arnes, the next Roberto Clemente, the next Selena, the next Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

I have a dream that in my lifetime any woman will choose to give birth to the next Walt Disney so that the imaginations of future generations of children will delight in their own animated icons as our generation has delighted in the voices and faces of Mickey Mouse, Beauty and the Beast, Ariel, Nemo, Shrek, Buzz Light Year and Mufasa. I want to publically thank Walt Disney's mother for choosing to give him life. Without it we would never know how his words, *if you can dream it, you can do it*, expands our imagination to enter the magic of a world and kingdom that delights our own.

I have a dream that in my lifetime a future President will be cut from the mold of the biblical wisdom teacher Sirach and be humble enough to role model leadership by inviting parents of future Trayvon Martins and parents of future George Zimmerman's to the White House Rose Garden, to guide the telling and listening of stories as a prelude to the healing of losses and for binding up the wounds of racial discord.

I have a dream that a future President, schooled in the wisdom of Sirach will be both courageous and humble enough to go to our dangerous cities and sit down side by side with gangs to initiate listening to stories and to stimulate their imaginations in how to find solutions to their anger and rage other than the street killings of future generations of Dr. Kings, Rosa Parks, Mary Bethunes, Clinton Fisks, and Thurgood Marshalls.

I have a dream that one day the White House will be reclaimed again as the Peoples house, where the least desirables in today's gospel parable – the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, hiding today in homeless American Vets, the unemployed, and street beggars, will be welcomed at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for a common folk luncheon as much as kings and prime ministers are welcomed there for state dinners.

I have a dream that one day the wedge of social divisions caused by sticking labels on people like: *left and right, rich and poor, gay or straight, blue collar and white collar, working class and corporate class, Main Street and Wall Street, believer and atheist*, will morph into a union of people who dream how to make the “the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, the dream of the common good.

I have a dream that one day the leaders of the NRA will grow humble enough to learn the difference between bullying its way to power and humbly serving the common good by investing as much money in scholarships as it does in political lobbying, to compensate for the brain pool and creative talents that has been lost by the massacre of America’s future to gun violence on school campuses.

I have a dream that Presidents and political leaders who dare to utter the words, *God bless you or God bless America* at televised policy speeches or campaign stops will atone for their hypocrisy and allow the same freedom to anyone who wishes to speak those words in schools, at town hall meetings, on athletic fields and in locker rooms. The Old Testament wisdom figure Sirach teaches in the first scripture lesson that the greater one’s station in life, the more one needs humility.

I have a dream today that pro-choice and pro-life will someday unite into a new movement: **NBC/TBA**. *No better choice, than being alive*.

I have a dream that this new movement will spread its message through bumper stickers, T-shirts, sports caps, plastic bracelets and any other way to market the good news about life being *No Better Choice*.

I have a dream that one day the valleys of our antipathies will be exalted and the mountains of our pride will be made low. The rough places of our separations and fears will be smoothed and the crooked places of our doubts and worries will be cleared.

I have a dream that we begin to release the religious imagination inside our faith; that it will become the flame that inspires us live out the true vision of the Psalmist who awakens us to pray today: “*God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.*”

I have a dream that this Psalm be fulfilled when we welcome the poor in the immigrants seeking to find a dwelling place among us so that in that welcome God can shower down a new inheritance for giving new meaning to the words of Emma Lazarus carved in the stone base of the Statue of Liberty: *“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”*

I have a dream that we engage the scriptures and celebrate the sacraments in ways that they evangelize us so that we claim them every day as graces for engaging the struggles of life as pathways to maturing faith.

I have a dream that like the prophets of the Hebrew tradition, whose dramatic vocation and courageous voices always revealed new chapters in God’s adventure with humanity, new prophets will rise up like Mohandas Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Anwar Sadat, Oscar Romero, Mother Theresa, Aung See Suu Kyi, and Pope Francis and call us to live out the gospel truth that non-violence is the only true intangible food that satisfies the deepest human hunger for peace and harmony.

These are my dreams, born from a retreat day with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. May they inspire you to fashion your own dreams. May they be dreams rooted in the faith tradition of the wisdom teacher Sirach, the Psalmist and the gospel storyteller, Jesus. Their prophetic words today remind us and challenge us that whenever we act humbly, make room in our lives for the poor and welcome the outcasts in our company then we bring glory to God.

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