


Testimony
A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating April 12, 2020

Communications with the editor may be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After a reflection on Holy Thursday by Al Eisch and the calendar, the Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on readings for Easter Sunday. Tom Keene's poem is *The Man Misunderstood*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>. Following the poem is a letter concerning sanctions during the pandemic, which was signed by a number of Pax Christi sections — including Pax Christi USA — the International Board and the International Secretariat and sent to President Trump, Secretary Mnuchin and Secretary Pompeo on March 27, 2020.

During the press coverage of the COVID 19 pandemic, interviewees who had some criticism to voice about mistakes by hospitals or some other aspect of the medical establishment, often asked that their last names not be used. They were afraid of retaliation. In totalitarian states, it is retaliation by a national government that people who speak to the press fear. It seems that in non-totalitarian societies, there is a problem of little tyrants, those who can cause their critics employment problems.

Reflection for Holy Thursday

Al Eisch

I have a going away gift for you.

I used to have major difficulty saying goodbye to people I had worked with over a period of time.

You probably know or have experienced various good-byes from relatives who live a long distance away. You might be able to visit each other only every five, ten or more years. What a lovely visit. I remember two sisters like that who before the tears began at the airport and thinking to themselves, "This might be

the last time I ever see you”, decided to purchase something special for the other as a remembrance. One chose to buy a special piece of jewelry for the other. The other sister who was leaving purchased a beautiful lamp for the living room where her sister would see the visual testimony of their mutual love and respect.

I, myself, about to leave a former student now the mother of three living in a forsaken village in France where I had the honor of having been reunited with her after decades wanted to gift her with a remembrance. I taught her in Peru and had visited the family which barely sheltered them. It had one chair for all 6 of them and a dirt floor. Her ideals remained grounded in her humility. I decided to purchase her and her children twelve matching glasses which would have been an improvement to their kitchen. To my surprise and as a bit of a reprimand, she didn't want to accept the glasses stating that she wanted to remember her roots. Certainly, admirable on her part and although my admiration for her values increased, it stung a little. Her grown children that night relished a bit of “luxury”.

We are approaching Holy Thursday and in chapter thirteen of John's gospel, Jesus is about to leave his dearest and closest friends. Jesus wants to give them a gift. Something special and unique. What would we imagine that to be or what would we have chosen as a gift? Well, at the very beginning of the chapter, Jesus removes his outer garments (symbolically his divinity) and in embracing total humanity, He begins to wash their feet. What? Why? Peter, like my former student, says, “No way. I don't want your gift”. However, Jesus convinces Peter that this will truly be the best sign of his love for them and gratitude for their companionship during the three years. This was meant to be a personal gift to the twelve. The Eucharist was to be a gift for all of humanity. But for them, Jesus wanted to express his intimacy, his closeness, his friendship. His teaching, sermons and signs were over. He had completed this teaching stage about to commence the redemption acts.

At what point, how many days later did it take for them to remember and appreciate the human expression of gratitude of having their feet washed? What better gift to another than to express one's appreciation and intimacy? How do we pour out our “all” to another? Have we ever done so? How would we do that? Do we do it only for our family and certain friends? Would we ever give our “all” to some outcasts in prison, in a refugee camp, on an Indian reservation, a Muslim, a racial minority or simply the poor in our city? Washing of the feet really grabs us by our entrails and questions the level of our Christian maturity? Have I learned anything this Lent? I still have time to dig deeply into my soul and not put

up a fight to imitate Our Lord. What will it take to finally grow into a full Christian?

Calendar

Events in Texas cities involving a gathering of ten or more people have been canceled because of the global pandemic.

Alternatives

Tuesday April 7, 7:00pm, "Ending War." David Swanson. Originally scheduled for the Peace Chapel at Cathedral of Hope, this has been changed to a webinar due to the pandemic. No charge. Details and RSVP:

<https://limitlesslife.wordpress.com/2020/03/24/free-webinar-david-swanson-on-ending-war/>

Webinar: Gun Violence in the Americas, Focus: Mexico

Powerful, important and very disturbing webinar from the Consortium of Universities for Global Health.

With the world's highest rate of lethal gun violence, the Americas are in the midst of an unmitigated public health crisis. Just six countries account for over half of 250,000 annual global gun deaths: the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Guatemala. But activists, medical professionals, human rights workers, and policy experts are working together to stop this bloodshed and the vectors that make it happen. This webinar brings together leading researchers and advocates on this issue. Very informative slideshow.

This 1-hour webinar is archived; it can be watched at any time:

<https://www.cugh.org/events/webinar-gun-violence-americas>

Former Parole Officer Reflects On His Time Supervising 'The Second Chance Club'

An interview on Fresh Air, from March 2nd. 36 minutes. In line with our goal to learn more about working in Reentry, we recommend this audio link, which also has an article accompanying it.

https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811187788/former-parole-officer-reflects-on-his-time-supervising-the-second-chance-club?fbclid=IwAR2VwA9uS4xBe0qqcm_NRXg0kqv6W104CtGsd5cqhfUh6dCTz--dEJeO5Y

Earth Day 2020 (April 22) Will Survive the Coronavirus By Moving Online

A lot of things are closed or canceled due to the global coronavirus pandemic, but Earth Day is not one of them. Organizers of the event have turned this year's 50th anniversary of the green holiday into the first-ever Digital Earth Day.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffkart/2020/03/17/earth-day-2020-will-survive-the-coronavirus/#49696b8c359b>

Brief video: Martin Sheen on the most deadly weapon.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkIREUWWX4s&feature=youtu.be>

Second Reading (Colossians 3:1-4, or First Corinthians 5:6b-8)

The *Letter to the Colossians* was written in the Pauline tradition, well after the time of Paul, to combat a syncretic movement that mixed local Phrygian folk belief, local folk Judaism, and Christian elements. The resultant cult blended Christianity with the magical hope of getting earthly results from religion. Today's counterpart would be the "prosperity gospel" wherein this-worldly prosperity is expected to come from Christian observances. The reading protests against such: "So if you were raised together with the Messiah, seek what is above, where the Messiah is seated at the right hand of God; think on what is above, not on what is on earth." It goes on to refer to baptism, whereby one dies to earthly hopes and is raised with the Messiah to a new life: "For you died, and your lie has been hid with the Messiah in God."

The alternative reading, from *First Corinthians*, likens the Christian community to leaven, yeast. It calls for a new yeast instead of what had been used before, resulting in a new raising. Rather than a puffing up with pride and boasting, the dough would expand with the Spirit.

Third Reading

(Three alternatives: John 20:1-9; Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:13-35)

John 20:1-9

"We do not know where they put him." Different gospels tell the story from their unique perspectives. The *Johannine Gospel* adds a recollection by the Beloved Disciple, a youngster at the time of the event, running ahead of Peter;

the two were reacting to Mary Magdalene's description of the body of Jesus being gone. The non-canonical *Gospel of Peter* tells the story from the perspective of Mary Magdalene: Fearing the Judean authorities, she and some other women had gone to the tomb in the dark of the early morning to mourn and prepare the body in the customary manner. On the way they wondered who could move the great stone at the entrance of the tomb. The implication to be drawn from the problem of the stone is that a prankster in the dead of the night could not be expected to have moved it and absconded with the corpse.

God, it turns out, is the ultimate prankster, leaving humans to wonder where Jesus could be contained. People firmly convinced of the adequacy of everyday human knowledge doubt the reports of the empty tomb, but perhaps doubt should be directed instead to the adequacy of any effort to contain Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea undoubtedly meant well, as would later devotees with their ornate tabernacles.

Matthew 28:1-10

“And behold a great earthquake occurred, for a messenger of the Lord, coming down from heaven and approaching, was rolling away the stone; and he sat over it. And his appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow.” Matthew customarily uses angels to provide theological context for events in the life of Jesus; this time the angelic messenger takes on some features of a theophany. Nevertheless Matthew was willing to cite natural events as instruments through which God works—an earthquake moved the stone that had been placed over the entrance of the tomb. The theophany-like event, which so frightened the guards that they fell to the ground and froze, accompanied the messenger, not the body of the Lord. Then the women came, witnesses to the aftermath, and they leave to inform the disciples. On their way they encounter Jesus, who gives them the message to meet him in Galilee.

There is a narrative of events here—first one thing happens, then another, and then still another.... More profound is a narrative of quest: If you do not find the Lord in one place, go on to another. Do not cease, even when gendarmes and death seem to be in the way.

Luke 24:13-35 (meant for Sunday evening services)

On the way to Emmaus: “...some women among us astounded us. Being at the tomb early in the morning, and not finding his body, they came speaking also about seeing a vision of messengers who said he was alive.” Hope does not end

but begins with an Easter experience. It may lack direction, even as our footsteps lead to a definite but unimportant destination; but then hope provides its own direction when everyday plans can be put on hold. Hope lives when the one they tried to kill is nevertheless alive.

Resorts to power are frequently intended to hide facts, stifle initiatives, dampen prospects, kill the spirit. The Easter experience, in contrast, is the ultimate “nevertheless” in the face of resorts to power. In its aftermath the conversation is to go on, until those who have entered into it want to continue into the evening breaking of bread.

Poem

The man misunderstood

“Don’t *cling* to me,”
I am said to have said
to Mary, my friend.
I had to go.
Unless I did,
you wouldn’t get
the spirit of it all.
You wouldn’t get
the whole point of my life,
or of yours.

So surrender forever
the notion you can own me.
It is enough to remember me
with wine and bread,
where you can taste
the blood-spurting, fleshy
meanings of me.

And please don’t reduce me to doctrine
or trivialize me with comfy feelings.
If you want God’s kingdom,

dump your images of kings.
If you want God's peace,
let go the hope that war will bring it.

If mythologize me you must,
let the myths *be* myths,
doors to the Unknown.
Don't bury my meanings
in tombs of words taken literally.
If you would explain me with words,
let them be lyrics to music.

So, don't cling.
If you want to meet me, feed the hungry,
free the prisoners, touch your enemies with love.
Such are the real presences
where universal compassion abides,
and I wait for you.

Tom Keene February 26, 2008

Letter calling on U.S. President to lift sanctions during COVID-19 pandemic

March 27, 2020

[Ed. Note: The following letter was signed by a number of Pax Christi sections — including Pax Christi USA — the International Board and the International Secretariat and sent to President Trump, Secretary Mnuchin and Secretary Pompeo on March 27, 2020.]

Dear President Trump,

We write to you out of deep concern for the people of the Middle East during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an international Catholic network with 120 member organizations around the world, we are hearing directly from our partners that daily life for people was already tenuous for many in places such as

Iran, Syria, and Gaza and these realities have only become more difficult as a result of COVID-19. **We urge you to ease and suspend sanctions (1) that negatively impact civilian populations and other restrictions that impair governments' abilities to respond to the health crisis. This includes financial sanctions that impact the ability of countries to import much-needed medical supplies and equipment.**

- **Iran:** COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on Iran. Long preceding the current crisis, sanctions have caused a shortage of medicines, medical supplies and equipment in Iran. We recognize that some steps have already been taken, including allowing humanitarian trade with the Central Bank of Iran (2). But U.S. sanctions are so sweeping that they impact Iran's entire economy, have made banks unwilling to carry out humanitarian transactions, and make it difficult for other countries to carry out transactions without triggering secondary sanctions. **The U.S. should lift sanctions on Iran that are impairing a response to this crisis.**
- **Syria:** The potential consequence of the virus in Syria is staggering. An estimated 11 million Syrians are already in need of humanitarian assistance, with 6.2 million displaced from their homes (3). Many lack adequate shelter and sanitation. Syria's health care sector has been seriously weakened as a result of military attacks in the ongoing war and the imposition of sweeping sanctions make it difficult to purchase medicines and medical supplies. **Rather than moving forward with implementing additional sanctions, the U.S. should ease sanctions that prohibit the import and purchase of badly-needed medicines and medical supplies and assure banks that such transactions will not trigger a reprisal.**
- **Gaza:** The strict Israeli blockade of Gaza has already made conditions "unlivable" for the residents of Gaza, apart from COVID-19. The UN and other international agencies have repeatedly called attention to shortages of key medicines and medical supplies, with up to 50% of basic medical supplies unavailable at any time (4). Population density, broken water and sanitation systems, and a under resourced medical system leave Gaza vulnerable to an uncontrolled COVID-19 outbreak that could also negatively impact Israel. Israel regularly denies permits to patients seeking medical care that is available only outside Gaza and when permission is granted, Israel often denies permits for accompanying family members, especially for parents of children. **The U.S. should immediately press Israel to ensure**

that medical supplies and technology are provided to Gaza, that patients needing treatment outside of Gaza are given the permits necessary for extended periods of treatment, and that family members, especially parents accompanying children, are also granted permits to travel.

As people of faith, our concern is for the most vulnerable people around the world. At this precarious moment, we call on the U.S. government to extend help to those living in increasingly desperate situations in the Middle East by **suspending sanctions that negatively impact civilian populations and other restrictions that impair governments' abilities to respond to the current pandemic.**

We pray for wisdom and compassion for you in these difficult times.

Sincerely,

Bishop Marc Stenger, Co-President (GFrance)

Sr Teresia Wamuyu Wachira (IBVM), Co-President (Kenya)

Ms Greet Vanaerschot, Secretary General (Belgium)

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- 1 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060092>
- 2 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/29/iran-sanctions-threatening-health#>
- 3 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/03.04.20_-_USG_Syria_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_5.pdf
- 4 http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_33-en.pdf

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<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

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