

"WEEP FOR YOURSELVES"

INTRODUCTION

In the 23rd chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, it is written:

"And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children'"

The words that catch our attention are the words of Jesus, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children". They seem too harsh for Jesus and unlike him. What he meant was that He was all right. He knew that he was going to die, and very soon, and brutally on a cross. But he had no fear of death, for he had no fear of life. Whatever happened to him, he knew that his life was in the hands of God.

Life, to be sure, was sweet for him. It had its bitter moments, but all along it was touched with bright spots, from Nazareth, to the Sea of Galilee, to Jerusalem. And he never turned aside from life whether it was sweet or whether it was bitter.

But now that his life in Palestine was coming to an end, he knew that life still lay before him, life richer, vaster, more wonderful than anything he had known in Palestine. He also knew with that divine intuition, that his death, painful though it would be, would lead him into something vaster; and untimely and unjust though it be, it might do something to the people, and something for the people. It might shake them out of their lethargy. It might open their eyes to the realities of life, to its ever-present evil as well as to the potential good. It might make up for their terrible mistakes. The suffering of the good has a way of restoring the balance of man's inhumanity. It might bring them to themselves, and bring them back to God. This, at least in part, is what he meant when he said, "Weep not for me...."

Of course he could not stop them. They followed him even though they did not always understand him. Whether they agreed with what he said about the Samaritans or not, they were human, and he, to all appearances was human too, no matter what else they later believed him to be. They were drawn to him as people are drawn to a man. He was a man of tremendous convictions and of enormous energy and courage. He had a compassion, a feeling for the down-trodden, the poor, the disadvantaged of his day. He said what he thought and he did what he believed was the will of His Father in heaven. Whether the people liked it or not, made not the slightest difference to him.

They felt something about him, something they could not put into words. And he was young. There was still so much to be done, and he was so able to do it. He told them not to weep for him. He might as well have told the rivers not to flow.

DEVELOPMENT

But what did he mean when he said, "Weep for yourselves and your children". They were not in any danger. No one could hurt them. They would go on living, working, laughing and loving for years. He was the one who was in danger. He knew that he was about to die because there was something radically wrong in the people. Not in every individual person, not necessarily in the women who were weeping for him, but in the life of the people as a whole. He knew that there was something radically wrong in the life of the nation, and he sensed that he was going to die because of that wrong.

He knew that they were meticulous about their religion, but that they could hate with unimaginable violence anyone who interfered with their practice of it. Their patterns, you see, were too precious to be changed for the sake of righteousness. Patterns of life - religious and social life - often take precedence to the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. He knew that they kept all the rules, but they let the values of life somehow quietly slip into the margins. He knew that they believed in God, but they did not believe in their fellowmen - not really. He knew that they were counting on the wrong things - things like money, status, the letter of the Law, which represented the past and not the future, and the violence of firebrands....to save them from the changes he was asking them to make...

And he knew with the unforgettable perception that he had, and that amazing understanding of the depths of human nature, and the meaning and the drift of history, he knew that these things would destroy them in the end, destroy even those apparently innocent women who were, according to their natural human emotions, weeping for him. They were not directly responsible for any of these things, except that they were a part of the nation. Even in their apparent innocence they bore the burden that rested on the shoulders of Pilate and the high priest.

The worst of it all was that they didn't see it. They didn't see that his death was the exposure of a wound in the life of their nation; they didn't see that at all. They were blind to that. They didn't know what he was talking about. They didn't see that belief in God apart from a belief in all men as children of God is empty and without meaning. They said they knew it, and they believed it, but they didn't practice it. They didn't see that violence never leads to anything except more violence. They didn't see that he could love them, and at the same time stand for things that they did not love. They didn't see - and this is the tragedy - they didn't see that they were the ones who were in danger, real danger - not he. And that is why he said, "Weep for yourselves and your children". Coffin

HAPPENS AGAIN Here, on the greatest page in history, we see written large what was ~~has been~~ re-written over and over again in history. To be sure, the type is smaller, the scale not nearly so cosmic, but the meaning is the same. We have experienced it more than once in recent years.

We know that the victim of violence is safe in his Father's care. He is all right and we have nothing to fear for him. We need not weep for him - yet, when we think about good things, the positive achievements of his life, whether or not we agreed with everything he said and did, no one can stop us from feeling as a human being about another human being - a young man who was enormously attractive, unusually gifted, growing in stature every day, with unlimited possibilities for great leadership still ahead of him. A father, a husband, and a son - no one can tell us not to weep for him, for his family - his wife, his children, his mother and father.

And when we think about what has been done to him, something may happen to us - to us as a nation. It may, I say - and then again, it may not. I pray God that it may. We may see in this event the seeds of hatred and violence that are buried in all of us that can be so devastating to everything that we admire and love, that on occasion sprout into view. Our eyes may be opened to the devastation of that hatred. We may see the possibility of violence not only in one fanatic, but in thousands of others and even in ourselves. Perhaps it is not the violence of a gun, but it may be the violence of a sharp word, or an ill considered criticism, or vicious gossip, or an act of disloyalty.

rid ourselves..poisonous prejudices

We may rise to the hour, learn to control our tongues, discipline our bodies, straighten out our values, separate ourselves from everything that is vulgar and cheap, and see hatred and violence for what it is - in ourselves and in our relationships with others, and in the life of our nation.

And we may also - and this I think is terribly important - we may also bring to light that good that is in millions of Americans - their basic decency, their good sportmanship, their love of fair play, and their desire to make life good for other people, their respect for law and order. It is there. It is buried beneath the surface of our common life, but it is there, and it needs to be shaken loose and rallied around some great purpose to make this country the kind of place that it ought to be and can be.

omit { And because of what once happened on a Friday centuries ago in Jerusalem, on a hill outside the city wall, because of that the death of men like John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, and now Robert Francis Kennedy may yet save a nation from disaster.

MEN WHO PRAYED WITH THEIR EYES OPEN

About four months ago, some reporters and television people were riding on a plane with

Martin Luther King as he visited towns in the southern states in connection with the Poor People's Campaign. One of the reporters said that King recalled the time in Philadelphia, Mississippi (where you remember the three civil rights workers were killed) when he realized the inevitability of his death. He was speaking in that town and Sheriff Rainey, one of the principal suspects in the case, was behind him on the platform. The reporters said King laughed as he recalled the moment when he said that the people were right behind him in their fight, and Rainey had growled in his ear, "That's right - I'm right behind you". King shook his head at the thought and said, "Well it came time to pray, but I sure did not want to close my eyes. Ralph (Abernathy) said he prayed with his eyes open".

Everyone in the plane laughed and then slowly stopped and became quiet. Film men put away their camera and sound equipment, sensing that they could not hope to catch a better sequence that day. "He prayed with his eyes open". We have a clue here to the style of three men who have died at the hands of an assassin in our time. Kennedy - King - and Kennedy - men who prayed with their eyes open to the needs of people of their time. And to be a Christian in this day and age is to pray with your eyes open, or as the Apostle Paul put it:

"To have the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which God is calling you".

OUT { To be a Christian is to see who you are - a "child of God" and to know that you are called to live in harmony with the rest of God's children. To pray with your eyes open - open to the needs of other people. These men who have died at the hands of the assassin's bullet have been men devoted to great and worthy causes, men who were dedicated to making and recapturing the greatness of America. We weep for ourselves, for our land, for our world, for their loss makes our common life poorer. They have articulated the claims of compassion and conscience.

LET US PRAY: O God, we thank thee for every good man and woman who serves his people honestly and fearlessly; but especially we are thankful for the life of thy servant, Robert Francis Kennedy, and we commend him to thy care and love.

Forgive our foolish ways of narrow prejudice and malicious hatred; help us to look forward to the future, not backward to the past, and give us the courage to see the other person's point of view.

May we now gather together the good things of this land that what once was scattered so carelessly may be bound together by learning and reason for the happiness and peace of all mankind. Amen

- - - - -

To be a Christian is to see who you are - "a child of God" and to see that you are called to live in harmony with the rest of God's children. These men who have died at the hands of the assassin have been men who prayed with their eyes open - open to injustice and poverty among the people's of our land. They have been men devoted to great and worthy causes, men dedicated to re-capturing the greatness of America. They have articulated so well the claims of conscience and compassion.

Lines written by Robert Abrahams some time ago came to mind this week as we witnessed this tragedy:

"Tonight Shanghai is burning - and we are dying too.
What bomb more surely mortal - than death inside of you?"

For some men die by shrapnel, and some go down in flames,
But most men perish inch by inch, in play at little games"

"But most men perish inch by inch, in play at little games".....I fear the line describes most of us, for we are involved in play at little games. King and the Kennedy brothers ~~were involved and~~ lost their lives being involved in the big games of life, the momentous issues, and history will point to the fact that they were on the right side in those games. And so we weep for ourselves, for our land, for our world - for our loss is great.

"He prayed with his eyes open".....We shall remember him as a "Good and decent men, who saw wrong and tried to right it, who saw suffering and tried to heal it, who saw war and tried to stop it". To quote his brother, "As he said many times in many parts of this nation, to those he touched and who sought to touch him:

✓E S: "Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not".

the issues upon which the door of history swings