

Daily Meditation 05-19-23

Courage = Trust_ The ...estimony of Fred Shuttlesworth

Good morning.

We continue our meditations on holiness today and its meaning. And we've called on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his teaching about courage about how love has to overcome our fear, how we have to love something more than our fear of death if we're going to live fully.

And of course Sister Dorothy Stang was such a person. She knew her life was in danger and she was advised by family and her community not to return to Brazil, because there was a sentence on her head from the kind of landowners and killers of peasants and rapists of the land and of the forest and the indigenous people, the kind of people who were threatening others were threatening her, but she went back anyway, because of love. She said, "I love the forest and the people of the forest, and I'm not going to cut my relationship to them."

And yesterday, we were exposed to the powerful life and teaching and courage of Bishop Casigalida, who himself was imprisoned by the military and stood up to the military. Many of his priests were killed, and sisters, and imprisoned and tortured. But he did not go silent about that. He was also accosted by the Vatican as was Archbishop Romero, his friend.

Today we celebrate the courage of Fred Shuttlesworth, one of the real leaders of the civil rights movement. Unlike Dr. King, who was his friend, he was not highly educated. He was a street minister. And he was a real leader in the cauldron of Birmingham at that time, the time of profound segregation. I told a few stories about his attacks from the Ku Klux Klan and so forth.

But one thing I want to elaborate a bit on is how he was in his 80s when I was invited to meet him and to join him in a dialogue about race and environmentalism. And, of course, this has become a more public issue since, but he was so attuned to the suffering of his people and awareness of it. And in fact, at that time, and it may be still today, there were more poison dumps in the state of Alabama than in any state in America. And no one was talking about that.

Where did we dump our waste? Dump it in areas where the poor, usually the black people, live. At that time in south Los Angeles, the poorest people, mostly black, had the worst air, the most polluted air. Studies showed that the amount of oxygen reaching the brains of children in that area was 1/3 less than in children in other parts of the United States. So that's just setting children up for failure, when as a child you do not get healthy oxygen, healthy air, your body and mind will pay a price.

So Fred was out in front of that topic when he was in his 80s. He had already fought this horrible but successful struggle against segregation in favor of civil rights, and they had won, laws been passed. But instead of retiring on his haunches, or bragging about the past, what he'd accomplished, he was moving forward with a whole new topic, though related, that of the environment and racism.

He was a fine model of courageous man, all these people were. And it's my experience that that's how you most learn courage is by hanging out with those who have demonstrated courage. Courage is not a course that you usually get in college; it's not a book you read necessarily. It's a practice, and it can spread like a good virus and not a bad virus, it can spread. We can learn from one another.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.