

Daily Meditation 02-19-24

Greater Love than This: Navalny, Sister Dorothy, MLK, Jesus

Good morning.

Today we are meditating on the martyrdoms of Sister Dorothy Stang, and most recently, Alexei Navalny's death in a Siberian prison camp. And apropos of the former, I received a letter from my poet friend, Rafael Jesus Gonzalez, in which he wrote,

Hi, Matt, thank you for your meditations on Dorothy Stang. I don't recall if I shared with you the poem "When the Angels Weep," that I wrote for Dorothy. Anyway, here you have it.

So I'll be sharing that poem with you. But before I do, I want to answer my own question, as I invited you in today's meditation, to consider what other dimensions of spirituality Alexei and Sister Dorothy have in common.

And I think one of them is the dimension of joy and justice, justice and joy. I noticed that the day before he died, Alexei was in prison, and we saw a tape of his actually joking with the judge in court. He appeared very joyful and smiling.

And we know that Dorothy too was a woman of joy. She loved celebrating life and celebrating nature, doing circle dancing. And in last week's meditations, we reproduced some of her drawings, playful drawings, childlike drawings, that she scribbled into her book on Hildegard of Bingen, that was found by her bedside after she died.

So this is very important, I think: that those who offer themselves up in the field of justice, also work from a place of deep joy. Joy has to do with emptying oneself, of rejection, and of victimhood, and of fear. And you see this in a lot of holy people.

So now I'll share with you Rafael's poem, "When the Angels Weep," for Dorothy Stang.

In the settlement of Boa Esperança, not far from Para, Brazil, they killed Sister Dorothy, Dora, Angel of the Amazon, as she held her Bible and said the Beatitudes. Remember her name. Remember Chico Mendes, and the myriad who died in 523 years of resistance, defending home

and rainforest, their names lost, and far too many tongues that spoke them. The ranchers, miners, loggers kill and do not care for life, nor tearing out the Earth's lungs for the Earth herself. They do not hear when the angels weep, knowing that the death of the forest is the end of our life." (That is a quote from Sister Dorothy.) Time grows short and the struggle goes on. Remember Dorothy, and all the martyrs for the Earth. Let us make our revolution fierce love.

A poem by Rafael Jesus Gonzalez, honoring Sister Dorothy.

Now another dimension to the story Navalny's life and death, comes from Father Nathan Monk, a former Russian Orthodox priest, who quit the priesthood of the Russian Orthodox Church, in revolt against its policies in alignment with the Putin government. He wrote about Navalny's murder, this:

I suppose days like today are intended to cause fear and silence opposition. The problem with dictators, is they do not learn from history as they attempt to repeat it. I am shaken, I will not lie to you. My dear friends, I am very tired. My throat is sore from the uncontrollable guttural sounds as I wept this morning, then again this afternoon, and now as I write this. Yet that isn't silence. The noise is still noise whether anyone hears it, and the vibrations of which have impacts we can never see.

For over a decade now, I have diligently attempted to sound the warning of certain things to come. I have screamed from the proverbial rooftops about the danger of Russia. As a result, I have been called everything from an alarmist to a fear-monger. Yet from the invasion [of Ukraine], to now the death of Navalny, it has been proven time and again: that there is no wickedness too far, for Putin.

The day after Russia invaded Ukraine, my inbox was full. I went back and read some of my previous posts, starting in 2013, when I left the priesthood of Russian Orthodox Church. Some people thought I was crazy. Instead of responding to each of these messages individually, I decided the most effective way I could be of help, was to write a book.

And then he talks about writing that book, or half a book, about the relationship of the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church. But then he felt it was so important, that he wouldn't reach that many people in a book like that. So he scrapped it in favor of a novel. And that novel has gotten into many people's hands: It is called "Russian Sleeper Cell."

He says "Today," meaning after Navalny's murder,

...the world is looking at Russia. Navalny has succeeded in ways he could have never imagined. Yet so many folks here do not understand the realities we are facing. We are living in a time of extreme conflict. It is easy to be filled with overwhelm in moments like this.

And this is one of the reasons he said he wrote a book, not from essays, but to entertain, in order to reach more people, and offer some understanding of what's behind assassinations and martyrdoms like Navalny's.

So with Navalny's death, and Sister Dorothy's death reminder, this past week, the 19th anniversary of her martyrdom — I think there's plenty for us to meditate on this morning.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.