

## When Injustice Became Culture asia.cmtpalau.org

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On May 25th 2020 several persons in Minneapolis witnessed the arrest and death of George Floyd, a black man. On the video posted in social networks it is clearly visible how the four policemen, one way or another, participate in violence which resulted in death of George. We can also hear how several times George says he cannot breathe. We see him losing his light, losing his conscience, losing his life, and being declared dead before arriving to the hospital.

The same day, a young girl of 17 years old in far mountain in the province of Bukidnon in the Philippines was crying. She was already in grade 12, it was only one more year for her to finish school. She had plans to make a professional course for caregivers, so she might find good job and help her family in situation of extreme poverty. But that day, all her plans got frustrated. The elders of her tribe and her family had decided that she should get married in some weeks. If she would say no, it would be a big sin and her family would have to pay to the family of her future husband because of the shame to which they were exposed. She was losing her life, which was destined to become the uncertainty of a life in poverty and farm work.

Why do I put these two stories, which happened thousands of miles of distance, together? We use to say that love doesn't understand about colors of frontiers. Neither hatred and injustice does. In 1963 Martin Luther King pronounces his famous discourse "I have a dream..." Today, after more than fifty years, we could repeat his words: "our life is still badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination... we still live on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity... we are still languished in the corners of American society and find ourselves in exile in our own land". What had happened so many years ago, repeats itself again in America, Philippines and many other places in the world. Why is it so? Because we allowed, in some way, that injustice would become a part of our culture. Of this culture of ours in which we grow, which we respect, in which we educate our children. We continue living in the world (and unfortunately also in the Church) where the few have power over many, only because they were born in situation considered privileged. The modern societies in their majority began with the principles of the French Revolution (freedom – equality – fraternity), but it seems to me it's still a long way until these ideals will become reality in our daily life

(and it's already more than two centuries!) And not only in what refers to racism or traditions of native tribes. We live in the world where a woman doesn't have equal rights like a man; where a black/yellow/homosexual person is discriminated even without anything wrong; where a black man is killed brutally in daylight; where a young girl from a tribe lives a life that she hasn't chosen for herself. Feel free to continue this list.

And the moment arrives when we need to ask ourselves: "What can I do? Is there any option, any alternative?" Yes, there are many different alternatives.

1. "The world and its concerns are not worthy of filling a place or space in the temple of your soul. Look at it at the height of your meditation; look at it nothing more than to put in order your relations and indispensable communications with God. In this matter do not argue with him, do not defend yourself, keep silent, pray and meditate and ask from him compassion (...) Keep silent; avoid discussions and disputes with the world, because this will be to descend from the height of the large rocks in order to struggle with strength against the waves of the sea" (Letter 40,3-4) Does it mean that she just should let it be, without worrying and getting dirty with the world? Absolutely no! We need to be conscious that we don't fight with something (somebody) who can be easily won over, "with our own strength", the violence and injustice are a system against which many have fought and died, without making it change. If in this fight we are not rooted in God, it is easy to fall under forces of frustration and discouragement. If we don't fight from God, easily in our heart there we be hatred, because we won't know how to be compassionate (yes, even with those four policemen who killed George and with those elders of the tribe who decided over the future of young girls). The things of great importance have to be treated first with God, "struggle with God" to make them succeed.
2. "We have faith? Well, go ahead; let us march, let us make progress; we have bound up with this virtue the hope and love of God and neighbors. Let us always go, always onward, until we arrive at the likeness and image of God; always ahead (...) Carry on the work of God! We are Catholics! Yes, we have faith; we have taken the first step; let us continue and in order to convey the work of God in

the individual and the work of God in the social body to its ultimate perfection; how much preaching has to work! She began; she has to continue until the end" (SVV 1,3) Let's do it! If we want the world to be a better place, we need to roll up our sleeves and get dirty. If we want our society to be more perfect, we cannot stay still, but work hard for its construction. I was happy because of the reaction of those who saw the arrest of George, because they really tried to do something. In these moments, thousands of persons are protesting and making their voice being heard. This is the modern preaching that has to continue. But we need to preach not only with our words, but also with our deeds. Let us begin with the small societies in which we live: our families, communities, centers of education and attention, parishes etc. Let them be places where justice reigns, not a person in authority; where the dreams of all can be heard, not only those of superiors and priests; where the children and the young would learn to live together without divisions on poor and rich; where all of us would be able to breathe freely without an ambience of prejudices and inequality.

3. "Offer yourself to take care of it [the wounded Body of Christ] and render it services that are within your ways and means" (Letter 42,2). Let's be honest: to change the system and the culture is not easy. It is possible that we will never achieve it. But it cannot be an excuse to stop doing what is in our hands. Thanks to some committed persons, a young girl from a tribe will be able to continue her education, even though it means to break some rules of the Center that will accommodate her (and for sure the elders won't be happy about it). Hopefully the death of George won't be in vein, but will become the beginning of a real change. There is a power of change in our hands, greater than we imagine. But this change has its price, and sometimes it is needed we sacrifice more than we have planned.

In classic mythology there is a story of Sisyphus. Because he rebelled against Zeus, he was punished severely: he has to push a giant rock to the peak of a high mountain, and every time when he is almost done, the rock will fall, and Sisyphus has to start anew. This story represents many of our efforts for constructing more just and equal world. With all our strength we push, but so many times we encounter a huge wall. We hit us again and again, although it seems there is no effect. In spite of that, we continue pushing. Not because of the punishment, but because, just like Martin Luther King, we have a dream. My dream is that in this world of ours the young girls will be able to decide their future by themselves, to receive education that like, to have alternatives in their lives. Which is your dream?