

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 13, 2022

Two Sundays ago we talked about prophets – biblical prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah - those who felt called by God and believed they were an instrument through whom God would work and speak. And we talked about modern day prophets like Martin Luther King, Pope Francis, the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu . . . and I asked us to think about prophetic voices that we might listen to today. Did you think of anyone who might be a prophetic voice for us in our modern times?

How about Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother from Oklahoma who was murdered in Guatemala in 1981 who is on the way to Sainthood! Fr. Stanley was a shepherd and pastor to the people of rural Santiago, Guatemala and taught them farming & irrigation, established a school and hospital and was a refuge for the persecuted people. Martyred July 28, 1981

Another prophetic voice a little closer to home - a prophet's story that needs to be retold.

Her name is Sr. Dorothy Stang. She has visited our city of Little Rock several times. Her blood sister is Mary Heil, best friend of one of our parish matriarchs, Mary Bea Hiegel. Mary Bea and Ken have been blessed to have welcomed Sr. Dorothy, perhaps a martyr and a saint in the making, into their home. Some of you may remember the Heil family, perhaps you went to Mount or Catholic with some the Heil children – there were nine of them – nine nieces and nephews of Sr. Dorothy.

It was because of her prophetic voice that Sr. Dorothy Stang, was silenced seventeen years ago today/yesterday with 6 bullets. On a rainy Saturday morning 17 years ago, Sr. Dorothy walked a trail in the Amazon Forest in Brazil, planning

to meet with 12 peasant farmers whose huts were burned by wealthy landowners in an attempt to take their land. She was confronted by a group of men with weapons. Sr. Dorothy, 73 years old, dressed in her usual second hand clothes and her ever-present ball cap . . . when these men brandished their weapons, Sr. Dorothy revealed hers – a bible – and she read – she read the same gospel we just heard today. And here we are, exactly 17 years later, to the day - we are reading that same reading that she, Sr. Dorothy, proclaimed on that muddy road . . . and she died for it.

For 40 years, Sr. Dorothy worked tirelessly in Brazil for the poor and she spoke out about the destruction of the environment. Like Fr. Stanley, they both lived with their names on a death list as an attempt to silence their message of the gospel. While Fr. Stanley stood up to the oppressive government, Sr. Dorothy stood in defense of land rights of the indigenous poor of the Amazon.

What outstanding examples of ordinary people, Stanley and Dorothy, who took these words of the Beatitudes to heart and brought blessings poor, the hungry and the hopeless.

As we prepare for Lent, may we come to know who are our poor, who are the marginalized, the hungry and the oppressed . . . and may we come to know how, we can bring blessings and hope to their lives.

In September 2021, Pope Francis invited Catholics worldwide to take part in the Synod on Synodality - a meeting to seek ways to walk together in spite of differences. In an effort to find out who and how and why some feel alienated from the church, the church seeks input. Why do some feel separated from the church? If you know someone who feels hurt or marginalized by the church, give them a copy of the information in the bulletin about going to our website and give some input.

I appreciate Pope Francis' and Bishop Taylor's effort to listen and learn.