

“When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him...”

~Genesis 22:9-12, NRSV

June 14, 2016

Dear Faithful,

A few years ago I was one of the faith leaders in my community that had decided to take a prophetic stand against homophobia--against hate, against fear. The Michigan Senate had passed an anti-bullying bill that included a “moral convictions” clause within the bill—an exemption which stated that it is somehow justifiable to bully if you are morally convicted to do so. I argued that morals had very little to do with the passing of this bill. Basically it was a license to hate and HURT children who were gay, lesbian, transgendered or bi-sexual. I met with students. I spoke at school board meetings. I wrote letters. I signed petitions. I marched in protests. **And** I openly challenged my clergy colleagues because of the damage we have done as Christian leaders-- for what we have taught the aggressors. *Somewhere in their faith formation they received from us, or someone like us, the message either by proclamation or cowardly silence that it is okay to hate and okay to act on that hate.*¹

I am saddened to say that with the recent massacre in Orlando, we are still standing at the edge of the same abyss. We are still standing at Abraham’s altar of sacrifice, only now we have guns in hand. These young men and women went out that evening in trust just like Isaac did when he went out with his father. That is, they went out with every expectation of being safe in one of the few safe havens offered to the LGBTQ community. And that trust has been deeply compromised and we will need to work hard as the Church to repair the damage done to God’s people.

The Orlando shootings over the weekend have been called many things. Was this an act of domestic terrorism? Yes, it was terrorizing. Was it an act of preventable gun violence? Yes, this could have been prevented with simple and sensible legislation. Was this a hate crime? Absolutely, hate was involved. And for all of these reasons, we, as people of faith, cannot remain silent. This can end now and it must. We can be the angel of the Lord disarming those who might sacrifice others. If you don’t know what you can do, I recommend you start with the work in which our bishops are already involved:

<http://bishopsagainstgunviolence.org/the-evidence/> Organized diocesan events and

¹ All italicized text is an adaption of my *Open Letter to the Clergy of Saline* written November 4, 2011 and published in the Saline Reporter shortly thereafter.

recommendations will continue to be posted on our Facebook page. If you have no words of your own then I offer you my adapted response to the Michigan Senate bill:

Is there ever moral justification to kill? Can there be such a thing as violence in the name of God? I believe that God answers this question quite clearly to all three Abrahamic faith traditions in Genesis 22:12 when God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. If we, as pastors, priests, and Christians follow that story further into the New Testament and truly believe that Jesus Christ was the ultimate sin offering, we cannot, in good conscience be complicit in offering up others to violence and death in God's name.

At today's 7pm Pilgrim's Mass we will do what the Church is good at. We will come together in community and pray for the departed: for the victims and the perpetrators of gun violence and for the victims and perpetrators of hate crimes. We will also pray for healing: for ourselves, for others, and for our broken world. We will light candles, we will anoint with oil, we will share the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, and then we will go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Please join us if you are able. If you are unable to attend, I invite you to pray where you are at and offer you the following litany found on our website.

http://www.stpeterscaz.org/uploads/3/4/8/3/34833246/a_litany_for_the_departed.pdf

Let us weep. Let us pray. Let us together act boldly in faith.

Peace,
Jeanne+