

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

Sr. Barbara O'Dea, DW reflects on the Gospel of Matthew (4:7), NYPD Det. Steven McDonald and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Sr. Barbara O'Dea, DW

Over the past two weeks, I was struck by two very different events. The first was the announcement of the death of NYPD Det. Steven McDonald. Shot in Central Park in 1986 by a teenager attempting to steal a bike, it left him paralyzed from the neck down. For the rest of his life, he remained dependent on a respirator and a wheelchair. His response was an incredible leap of faith. In extreme darkness, he discovered his call to spread the Good News of forgiveness and peace. Supported by his faith, his wife and family, and his co-workers, he chose to live life to the limit of his capacities. Eight months after this tragedy he publicly forgave the teen who shot him. His mission had begun.

Det. McDonald gave talks in schools, public and Catholic; encouraged bringing police and the communities they served closer together in his native New York. When invited, he carried his message to places as far away as Bosnia. The thousands who attended his wake and funeral or stood as an honor guard along the way are witnesses to the fact that his life speaks to desires deep inside us all.

The second event was the holiday commemorating Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Pastor and Church leader. He experienced the darkness of racism and the segregation it spawned. The Spirit of God touched his heart and transformed him. In response, he devoted all his energies to proclaiming the gospel values of freedom and justice for all wherever he went. Like Jesus, he risked taking the path of non-violence - preaching, teaching, leading marches to promote his passion, cost what it may. *We shall Overcome* became the anthem of the movement. Thousands of people from all races and religions joined him.

Steven McDonald and Martin Luther King were two very different people. Yet both heard the call of Christ in their own lives and became faith-filled disciples to the end. Through each of them, so many more, who have ears to hear and hearts open to respond, have recognized their own call. It has changed their hearts and touched their lives. And so the movement spreads. The struggle is not over, but it continues to bear fruit.

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If we probe the message of Matthew's gospel (4:17), there are points of convergence. Jesus recognized his call to mission at his baptism in the Jordan. Hearing that John the Baptist had been arrested by Herod, the gospel reports that he returned to Galilee. Leaving the security of Nazareth, he set out for Capernaum by the sea. From that day on, Jesus began to preach: ***Repent and believe the Good News for the Kingdom of God, the world as God created it to be, is at hand*** (Matt. 4:17). Good News for those ready to accept it; a sign of division for those who refused it. Jesus spent the rest of his life preaching, teaching, healing, proclaiming God's compassionate love and merciful forgiveness in his words and actions.

Now the call to spread God's reign is ours: a way of peace, non-violence, truth, using our gifts for the good of all. Today it is our turn to hear the call and let Christ speak to our hearts.

He did not stop there. From the beginning, he called others to become disciples, a call that involved two vital aspects: leaving everything that might be an obstacle behind and devoting their lives to serve others. Among the first were, Peter and Andrew, James and John. They joined him immediately. They learned from him, became his disciples and followed his way, not counting the cost. The movement was launched. It continues to bear fruit to this day.

Now the call to spread God's reign is ours: a way of peace, non-violence, truth, using our gifts for the good of all. Today it is our turn to hear the call and let Christ speak to our hearts. As people of faith, we are called to leave behind all that is darkness in our lives and times: hatred, violence, 'fake' news, excessive competition and to reach out in compassionate service to others.

Do you hear Jesus' call in your life? Are you ready? What will your response be? In the spirit of St. Paul's urgent appeal to Timothy, ***Fan into a flame the gift of God bestowed on you*** (2 Tim.1:6); use it for the good of all. Take some time to reflect on your gifts; pray for the grace to see what you are being called to do and ask for the courage to do it.