

“Where Were You When...?”

- Christ the King
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- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

We all have certain experiences in our lives which were so impactful that we remember forever where we were, what time of day it was, who we were with, even where we were standing or sitting when the experience occurred. In my 28 years at Seattle U. I of course remember a very early morning just after 6:00 am, when as I was reading the newspaper in the Jesuit livingroom in Arrupe, a Jesuit named Tony Harris hurried in to tell me that the TV was showing a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. I'll always remember where I was at that moment. Time stopped.

Perhaps even more powerfully I remember another moment some years earlier. It was about 7:10 am, November 16, 1989, and I was having breakfast with other Jesuits in the dining room in Loyola Hall, which at that time was our community residence. A young Jesuit named Rick Ganz came rushing in, bawling, and blurted out that the radio was reporting that six Jesuits and two women had been shot to death in the night at the Jesuit residence at the University of Central America in El Salvador. I can remember exactly where I was at that moment. This week and this Mass for Hope marks the 27th anniversary of that event which struck at the heart of all Jesuit universities, and this Jesuit university. Soldiers from the Atlacatl Brigade—some trained in the US by our military—roused all the Jesuits who worked at the university from their beds, dragged them outside and shot them all at close range in the back of the head. They then shot the two women—a mother and daughter staying there for safety—so there would be no witnesses. I can still hear the echo resounding through the Church of St Joseph's here in Seattle that evening in 1989 when, as they called out the name of each of the eight El Salvador Martyrs, they struck a large wooden cross with a mallet. The moment, the name, and the martyr was driven home. Time stopped.

Time stopped for me and a place got locked in me forever in El Salvador when I went by bumpy back roads to the field where the bodies of four churchwomen were found in a shallow grave. Sister Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, Sister Maura Clarke and Sister Ita Ford were captured near the airport by a right wing death squad, raped, tortured, killed and hastily buried in that field on December 2nd, 1980, because they took the side of and worked with the poor. The military wanted no more Americans to come and support the poor. I still see the marker over where their bodies were found by neighbors in that remote field after they had fallen into the hands of evil men. Time stopped. I am still there.

We celebrate this Mass for Hope, remembering the martyrs of El Salvador, on the feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of our liturgical year. This Sunday of Christ the King summarizes the entire year: the whole cycle of the anticipation, birth, life, death, resurrection, presence, and mystery of Christ, our faith in and commitment to him as a people, and his promise of the future and final kingdom of God in which we will reign with him. This could be a glorious, a triumphant, manifestation and celebration of Christ. Instead we are presented with another martyr, Christ the Martyr, handed over, tortured, nailed to a cross, mocked, degraded, and dying,

but before he dies reaching out not with his hand but with his heart in compassion and forgiveness to a criminal hanging next to him and assuring him of being that day at home with him in Paradise. That's the image of Christ the King we are given this day, Christ the Martyr and King, Christ of the Kingly, Compassionate heart.

This experience of the cross in our faith is another of those moments, the central one, in which we remember where we were and where we are. The crucifixion is the moment in history in which time stopped, in which all time was divided in two, into a before and an after, and by which we are placed forever there at the foot of the cross. The African-American spiritual coming out of the experience of slavery says it well:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Yes, we were there; yes, we are still there. There is the stopping place of our lives, the revelation of our God, Christ the King on his throne, Christ the Martyr compassionate to the end and forever. The El Salvador Martyrs are martyrs because in their deaths they were by faith there when they crucified their compassionate Lord. The soldiers sought to eliminate all witnesses but instead they made the six Jesuit priests and two women, and the four churchwomen witnesses even today to the martyred Christ, to Christ the King, and to our hope in him.

Let me tell you of another one of those moments when even now I remember where I was. I was making an eight-day silent retreat one summer here on campus and was staying in a room on the sixth floor of Bellarmine. My director handed me a card with a quote on it to pray on for a whole day. I read it:

Our hearts are too small. We must enlarge our hearts' desires to ask the questions Jesus came to answer, and to seek the things he came to give.

I looked out the window at the gas station on 12th; I can still see the typing on the card with that quote. Time stopped. I remember where I was. It is still with me.

Our hearts are indeed too small. Christ's heart was so large that it had compassion even while dying on the one criminal—and don't you know on the other criminal as well? His heart was so large that it did not defend against or reply to the mocking he received. The hearts of the Martyrs of El Salvador were so large that the real reason they were murdered was because their hearts embraced the whole people of El Salvador in their oppression and poverty and they put their lives on the line for them in their teaching and action.

I recently realized that my heart is too small too. After the recent election I realized that my heart is not large enough. I don't really hold in my heart white working class people who have been left behind, for whom jobs, immigration, guns, and religion are actually quite important. My heart is so small that from my privilege I hold them in disdain, think of them as narrow, uneducated, blind. I don't have a heart big enough for them because in my privilege I don't

know them or associate with them. Rather than having a heart large enough to hold them too in my heart, as well as persons discriminated against or undocumented students whom I do know, I judge them. They need a place in my heart; they need a place in the hearts of all of us. Christ holds them—as he does us and all—in his heart.

Our hearts are too small. We must enlarge our hearts' desires to ask the questions Jesus came to answer, and to seek the things he came to give.

May this Sunday be a stopping place for us. May the memory and anniversary of the Martyrs of El Salvador, this Mass for Hope, and this feast of Christ the King, call and help us to enlarge our hearts in compassion for all, to put our faith in action by works of justice, and to pray and live the largeness of heart of our King and Martyr.