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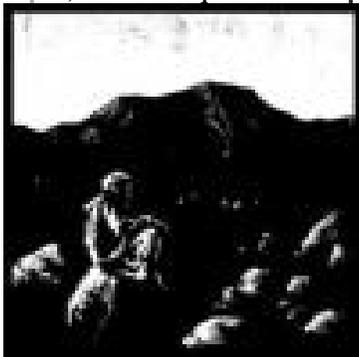
Taking responsibility for ourselves, our world

by Patricia Datchuck Sánchez

Imagine that paper and pencils were distributed right now and each member of the praying assembly was asked to answer the question "What is wrong with the world?" How might you respond? In no time, most of us could probably fill both sides of the paper with a list of calamities: war, poverty, homelessness, violence, unemployment, famine, flood, greed, apathy, crime, global warming, flash mob vandalism, an out-of-touch hierarchy, child abuse, spousal abuse, elder abuse, earthquakes and more.

Now, as each of us considers our list, let us also ask, "Who is to blame for such a broken world?" and "For which of these incidents of human suffering am I culpable?"

Before we cast blame on a generic scapegoat -- "those people," liberals, conservatives, Democrats, Republicans, the younger generation, the "boomers" -- it may prove helpful to remember the words of the late Pope John Paul II, who reminded us that just as the sins of a society begin with one individual, so the renewal and transformation of society begins with each individual (The Good Book, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Gomes quoted the old cry, "Lord, send a revival, and let it begin with me."



Some of the good and upright among us may assert their innocence and refuse

to accept any responsibility for this world's predicaments. However, it could be argued that unless each of us plays an active part in alleviating the evils around us, then we remain complicit. In a word, we are

all accountable for the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Gomes has insisted that each of us face life squarely and admit three things: Evil is real; the good are not as smart as they think they are; and the good need all the help they can get -- we cannot be good on our own. One of the first and best defenses against every sort of evil is the acknowledgement that the good must work together against it. For that reason, Gomes, a Baptist minister who served as assistant minister at Harvard Divinity School, highly recommended the Catholic sacrament of reconciliation. Confession not only cleanses a person spiritually but it also names evil for what it is, objectifies it and requires sinners to take responsibility for it. Once evil has been honestly engaged, then with God's grace and the support of other believers, evil can be overcome by goodness.

This action against evil in all its forms is not a swift or easy process. It is moved forward by the fervor we bring to the season of Lent now beginning. We come together, sinners all, to admit the truth of ourselves to God and to one another. We come together to acknowledge responsibility for our world and its ills and evils. We come to pray together and to listen as the sacred texts speak their timeless wisdom and extend their challenges to all of us.

Through the story of Noah and the great flood, the authors of Genesis remind us that no one goes it alone in this world. God has chosen to be bound forever to us and to our world in a covenantal relationship. This bond offers human beings and all living creatures a dignity that is to be respected and preserved. This covenant supersedes all the differences that divide us and all the controversies that place us at odds with one another.

Just as Noah and company were preserved in the ark from the floodwaters, those who are baptized into Christ are saved through the waters of the sacrament. Reflecting on this gift, the pseudonymous author of 1 Peter understood baptism not just as a physical cleansing but also as a spiritual purification that clears one's conscience for doing what is right and good.

In a few terse words, the Marcan evangelist has attested to Jesus' own encounter with evil and the fact that he did not struggle alone. With the Spirit to guide and inspire him and with angel messengers to support and strengthen him, Jesus emerged from this sortie with Satan to announce the reign of God, which is to be welcomed in repentance and faith. Today, we are recruited anew in the struggle against evil. To that end, we acknowledge our responsibility for it and our willingness to work toward its transformation.

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