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Calling for the closure of Guantanamo

by Mary Ann McGivern

NCR Today

Across the United States, people are fasting in support of the fasting prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and of the closure of the Cuban prison. Friday marks 100 days since inmates began fasting. Witness Against Torture invites people to join a one-day solidarity fast over the weekend.

Gandhi articulated the theory and developed the practice of political resistance by suffering. Satyagraha willingly carries the burden of the enemy: standing unarmed in the path of an army, walking unarmed to the sea to collect untaxed salt, enduring beatings and arrests, fasting to death. Practitioners pressure opponents into submission by refusing to oppress them. It was from Gandhi that Martin Luther King Jr. learned these principles of nonviolent resistance, though fasting was not a primary tool of the American civil rights struggle.

Fasting is also an overtly religious act to purify the body, purify motives and build community. Jews fast on Yom Kippur to express sorrow and repentance for their sins. Buddhist fasts serve as reminders of our transitory nature. Trappist monks fast to bear the burden of the world's sin as well as their own.

But Jesus is the eminent model for strategic fasting; that is, fasting as a long-range plan to gain an end, a spiritual end. After 40 days in the desert without food, he resisted the temptations of wealth and power and later advised his disciples that some devils can be driven out only by prayer and fasting.

We don't know the inspiration or inner motivation of the Guantanamo inmates in their fast. The military guards tie them to a chair and force-feed them through a tube that runs down their nose into their stomach. My own motive is my conviction that our use of torture and the imprisonment at Guantanamo are evil. And so I pray and fast.

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