

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

White supremacists gathering in Charlottesville Virginia last week abused the rights of free speech in our country in order to foment hatred and inspire violence. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, speaking on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote, “The abhorrent acts of hatred on display in Charlottesville are an attack on the unity of our nation and therefore summon us all to fervent prayer and peaceful action. The bishops stand with all who are oppressed by evil ideology.”

At a time when the careless rhetoric of American and North Korean leaders stokes the fear of nuclear warfare, suspicion has gripped peace-loving citizens both beyond and within our borders. Faithful Christians are especially vigilant to proclaim the confident message of God’s justice. We feel called to advance the world toward greater unity and understanding, not to collapse it into proliferation of racism and arms.

Many Americans prophetically assert that the false values of the news-mongering few do not represent our moral vision. Yet times like these invite all of us to reflect on prejudices we secretly keep and the methods we use to resolve our differences. Many of us disdain those who are homeless, sick or foreign. We solve disagreements through elusive silence, abusive words, angry tones or physical force. We pay for entertainments that promote violence and train us in thoughts of inhumanity. We have many of us contributed to a fabric of society that makes extremists feel that they have permission to imperil trust and goodwill, indeed that their perverse acts of racial violence express a world of virtue.

The foundational story of Christianity springs from the hate-filled violence committed against Jesus on Calvary. He died upon the cross in the full view of his own mother. Up close Mary witnessed the conflict between good and evil.

The Book of Revelation envisions “a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns,” waiting to devour the newborn son of a woman “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet.” The mysterious vision describes the victory of God’s plan through triumph and protection: “Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God.”

In celebrating the Assumption of Mary today, we proclaim in confidence that God reigns supreme, high above the throne of any earthly leader, high above the car seat of any individual driving with hatred. God also reigns supreme over our hearts, especially when we harbor thoughts and make decisions that damage the bonds of the human family. We are not without help. In the Assumption of Mary, God has taken her to a protected place where she may intercede for us. Each time we pray the Hail Mary, we include this fervent petition: “Pray for us sinners.” She who witnessed violence against her own son also witnesses his triumph; she who witnesses the sins of humanity still lifts our dreams and guides us on paths of peace.

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