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February 3, 2008: *Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time*, World Day for Consecrated Life  
Our Lady Queen of Peace

For our homily today, I would like for us to consider two commemorations that could be significant for our Parish. Black History Month and today's World Day for Consecrated Life. As Our Lady Queen of Peace was founded for Black Catholics in Arlington and always staffed by religious communities, especially the Spiritans, it seems appropriate to bring these celebrations to today's Word of God.

At first glance, we may ask why we celebrate Black History Month in February, after all, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday is in January. It was Dr. Carter Woodson, an African-American man who went on to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, who started Black History Week because he was outraged that the history of black people was not told in America's books. He picked a week in February because it was the month when Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass were born. Black History Month started out of the concern that the stories of black men and women would stop being told.

World Day for Consecrated Life is a new celebration in our Church, just 11 years old. The late Pope John Paul II started it for a number of reasons, including the need to remember the work of so many sisters, brothers, and priests in religious communities whose lives and ministries have so greatly contributed to the Church. I would like to quote from the pope's letter where he started this event:

We should never forget that consecrated life, before being a commitment of men and women, is a gift which comes from on high, an initiative of the Father "who draws his creatures to himself with a special love and for a special mission" (VC 17). This look of special love profoundly touches the heart of the one called, who is urged by the Holy Spirit to place himself or herself in the footsteps of Christ, in a particular way of following him, by means of assuming the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience. A stupendous gift!

While these two commemorations are points of celebrations, they were begun by Dr. Woodson and Pope John Paul because of their concern that people and their stories would be forgotten, and this can never happen.

This was the message of Zephaniah, a prophet we rarely hear at Church. Maybe one of the reasons we don't hear too much from him is that he does not have too much to say. After all, his book is one of the smallest in the Bible. It is only three chapters long. But today, he has a lot to say to us in the brief 78 words that comprised our first reading.

Zephaniah wrote during a time when his listeners were experiencing tremendous political chaos and deep religious confusion. Sound familiar?? Our country and our world are in deep political chaos. These stable United States have already endured a primary campaign that has cost well over \$1.5 billion, and we don't even know who is going to be running come the general election. Wars rage, and even we are in the middle of one.

The land in which Zephaniah spoke just this week saw more suicide bombing that killed more than a 100 people.

And, yes, these are confusing religious times. We Catholics continue to heal from the evil of clergy sexual abuse and are praying that our leaders will reclaim their voice of authority on social issues beyond sexual ethics and abortion. We seem a little too worried over which language we should pray Mass in. Our Protestant brothers and sisters are navigating the quagmire of homosexuals in ministry that has them on the brink of permanent division. And, most painful of all, places in our world are at war...all in the name of God. Is this healthy religion that has the human person as the highpoint of God, the Creator?

Yes, like Zephaniah and his people, we are in political and religious chaos. And, what did he say: "Seek justice, seek humility." Is it that easy? That simple? No, I don't think it is easy at all. Perhaps this is the reason why we still need to listen to Zephaniah, who was speaking on behalf of his world's needy. Justice and humility haven't taken hold of us yet. Almost 3,000 years later, we still need these words!

I would like to quote from a book by Jesuit Father Fred Kammer, past president of Catholic Charities, USA:

Standing with the poor begins and introduces us into a new way of seeing the world around us. This underlines the importance of personal contact with poor persons, human faces with names, families, histories, and aspirations. This insistence on personal contact runs against our culture's proclivity toward the faceless poor. We can avoid them by working in an enclosed office complex, living in actual or simulated suburbia, shopping in well-policed malls, and cruising in between home, work, and social life on raised expressways in air-conditioned/heated automobiles with tinted windows and stereos. Even if the poor were crying out to us in unison for bread and solidarity, we would not hear or see them unless it was filtered to us in a thirty-second spot on our televisions. Making the invisible visible, however, is our first step on the way to compassion.

As the events of Black History Month and World Day for Consecrated Life were begun because people were being forgotten, justice seeks to remember all people. Justice is never forgetting humanity. Rather, justice is remembering humanity, one real person at a time. And, this type of justice takes a real humility that says I am as human as the next person, no matter who he is, how much she earns, where they live, or what they have done with their lives.

Church, who are we in danger of forgetting. Is it someone in our family, is a group of people in our society or part of the world, or is it someone in our past?

Seek justice, seek humility, and we shall be blessed indeed!