

HOMILY, OCTOBER 1, 2006
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN THE ORDINARY TIME
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Introduction

This has been one of the worst weeks of my life. Our government, the Congress swayed, impelled, seduced by the Bush Administration, this week legalized torture. As the lead editorial in today's Washington Post says, this action is "A Profile in Cowardice".

I But I should not speak about this matter in the first person. Think how a person like Sister Dianna Ortiz must be feeling. She herself was tortured and since that awful experience has worked to abolish these dehumanizing, barbaric practices around the world – bringing survivors of torture with their horrible, unspeakable memories to this city to share their experiences – and now, she told me in a long conversation late this week, she's devastated to find that Washington officially condones these same atrocities.

II One might hold out hope that the U.S. Supreme Court might see that this legislation patently violates all that the Bill of Rights in our Constitution stands for. But I'm afraid that in the words of Dorothy Day "this whole rotten system" has lost its moral compass in the name of National Security.

It's ironic that all of this has taken place almost exactly 60 years to the day when the Nuremburg Trials in Germany concluded that the citizens of another brutal regime were accountable for the crimes of their country.

To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill: "If this American Empire were to last one thousand years, they will say this was its darkest hour".

III So where do we turn? What do we do? To whom do we go?

To the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power in every circumstance and every opportunity God gives us.

I believe that we're all called to be prophets, as Moses wished for his people in today's 1st Reading. We're called to join all those who are with us because they are not against us, as Jesus advised his disciples in the Gospel we've just heard.

I believe that we are all called to break through what the great liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, calls the "counter-prophets – anti-prophets", whom St. James rails against in today's 2nd Reading from James. We're called to reject euphemisms being used in to describe what the Congress has passed: "alternative interrogation practices"

"tools needed to handle terrorism suspects"

"alternative sets of procedures"

and call this TORTURE – plain and simple.

(A visitor to our community this week spoke of getting arrested a few days ago near the White House in a protest of the war. Intentionally or unintentionally, the police

handcuffed him very tightly with those plastic cuffs which cut into the hands and cannot be loosened. This fellow told the arresting officer that after twenty minutes in that state he would be ready to confess anything. That's torture, even though we wouldn't think of handcuffs as instruments of torture.)

Conclusion

Two years before Nuremburg a Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood over against the Nazi torture machine and lost his life at their hands – a true hero and a martyr. Years later a poem in Pastor Bonhoeffer's honor contained these words which bring a fitting conclusion to this homily:

“And he heard the midnight bells jangling. If you permit this evil, then what is the good of the good of your life?”

Postscript:

Please understand that I speak all of these words in the first place to myself. I need to hear them.