

A Letter to Holy Family's Teen Faith Community on the Orlando Tragedy

Dear Teens,

Hearing the news about the slaughter in Orlando we thought, **'Not again!'**

A cry of heartbreak began to rise from deep within – **'Enough!'**

Into our minds came the faces of those we know and love, labeled and deformed by names meant to isolate and exclude, denigrate and wound,

Memories flooded us about other moments of violence done and endured.

In the midst of this latest catastrophic, violent and targeted act of terror we are thinking of you. The victims in Orlando were not only members of the LGBTQ community, not only Latino/a, they were young. Like you, they stood on the brink of great promise. They, their families, their friends, their classmates, their co-workers, their lovers – indeed all of us – have been robbed of the light and love they would have continued to bring into our world.

**You are...
God's beloved...Deeply
loved...Richly gifted...
Highly favored...
Abundantly blessed**

Our hearts ache for you. You should not have to live with such soul shattering violence. We felt strongly we needed to reach out to you and say:

- We believe that you, and we mean everything you are and will become, are beloved by God and given to us as a gift to cherish
- Your presence at Holy Family inspires us.
- We give thanks for the courage, strength and love we find in you.

In the coming days you will hear many competing interpretations about the tragedy in Orlando. Law enforcement professionals, community leaders, social activists, religious authorities, politicians and journalists - along with the survivors and the families and friends of those who died - will try to make sense of what happened. Many will look for someone or some group to blame, others will grow cynical. **We want to be voices for you of hope and encouragement, comfort and healing.**

HATE is nothing new. It is as old as Cain and Abel, a destroyer of all that is good and holy. Hate in **ALL** its forms maims and kills. "Like an unchecked cancer," Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "Hate causes one to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true."

There is nothing good in the acts or words of hate; nothing of God.

We cannot deny the fact that hate is part of living; a lesson learned, sometimes from those we love and trust, sometimes from experiences misunderstood. Hatred breathes anew in revered authorities that defend ways of thinking, feeling, and being that protect the status quo. Often disguised as a form of righteousness, hateful words and deeds are justified; proclaimed useful in rooting out wickedness. They are not.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Hate is born of anger, fueled by jealousy, informed by falsehood, stoked by vengeance greed and arrogance. It twists our thoughts, inflames our feelings and distorts the truth. Hate seeks to ruin that part of us made in the image and likeness of God – the longing to connect and be with others, the desire to be in communion. Hatred is the tempter's tool to rip us apart, to leave us bereft and alone in terror's grip. **You are not alone.** There will always be a place for you here. You belong to this and other holy families.

Amidst the wail of the afflicted hear the notes of hope. It resounds within us as we rally round the power of love. Hope rises when we, who believe in love, gather with each other in compassion and healing. It quickens when those who take to heart Christ's command, "*love one another as I have loved you,*" tend to the brokenhearted. Hope grows when all are welcomed and welcome others. We can defy and deny the logic that argues war is a necessary evil, massacres and gruesome crimes are inevitable. **Do not be deceived or discouraged by hate's rhetoric** that tells us we must disconnect and stand apart, divide and conquer. Do not be tempted to leap to judgment and condemnation, 'for hate stirs up trouble', says the scripture.

Know that we hold you tenderly in our hearts, enfolding you in prayer. May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The Lord be with you all!

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