

**December 20, 2020 | 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (B)**

[2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16](#)

[PS 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29](#)

[Rom 16:25-27](#)

[Lk 1:26-38](#)

*By Rhett Engelking*

The Uncertain Future of Resistance

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

When Jesus preached in his Sermon on the Mount, to "offer no resistance to one who is evil" (Mt: 5:39) he directly challenged the impulse for retaliation that so many Jews experienced in the face of disempowerment. They were a community suffering under Roman occupation after all, and when any of us witness abuse of power, who would impulsively advocate that the victim should submit her right cheek to further abuse? Yet, when the power of the Most High overshadowed the Virgin Mary, her response to this deprivation in her autonomy was, "May it be done to me according to your word."

The prophesied gift of liberation that Mary and her community wholeheartedly desired was a matter for her of consenting to an emerging good. Instead of seeing the burden of a child as a threat to her personal autonomy, Mary's internal posture was one of nonresistance to the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the reality that faithful women have been pioneers at the heart of every lasting movement is an acknowledgment that the Christian movement was not based upon an internal posture of resistance but rather one of acceptance, if not full-blown enthusiasm. It is for this reason that the impulse toward resistance in the face of disempowerment needs to be reexamined. While Jesus led a spiritual revolution, he did not preach an internal posture of resistance.

The grieving model developed by psychiatrist Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has been therapeutically adapted to numerous traumatic experiences of disempowerment and, with the exception of acceptance, each stage describes an internal posture of resistance to reality. When she outlined a model of emotional mourning followed ultimately by acceptance. Without such a confrontation, it becomes difficult to distinguish between illusion and reality.

Among the voices calling for the United States '\$2 Trillion "War on Terror" after 9-11 were those who angrily proclaimed the terrorist attacks were a Muslim assault on Christianity. Many of those same voices were further angered when a man with a Muslim name was elected president while still in the midst of that war. The cries of "Not my President" were eerily similar to the cries of denial heard when a man who campaigned with white supremacist rhetoric and behavior associated with toxic masculinity was elected. While both sides of our national divide continue to struggle with maintaining an organized resistance to the existential threat posed by the other side,

casualties mount in the war on terror and divisiveness overwhelms families even in the midst of what could otherwise be a joyous holiday season.

So, what is the future of Resistance?

As followers of Jesus, we were warned that we would be heirs to an upheaval that would set the world ablaze and create division in families (Mt 10: 34-36) so it is incumbent upon us to accept that some external posture of resistance is dictated by lovers of truth and justice. However, we also must acknowledge that the mother of this Christian revolution's internal posture of acceptance (not resistance) to the current state of reality is what brought her favor with God. Such a posture certainly acknowledges all of the sins that have coalesced to produce a traumatic event, but it also includes the emerging hope that is present in even the worst of situations.

What made Mary truly revolutionary was that she was able to see beyond fear in evaluating her situation. Trust in God is the challenge presented by the Gospel to those with an impulse to resist through denial or anger. When we vehemently insulate ourselves from the internal experience of injustice, we often insulate ourselves against the hope that accompanies that experience. Resistance that is both revolutionary and sustainable must first stem from a decision to accept all that has happened because whatever follows cannot afford to be built upon an illusion.

In a response letter to a young activist frustrated by the turbulent political climate of 1966, [Fr. Thomas Merton wrote](#), "The real hope... is not in something we think we can do, but in God who is making something good out of it in some way we cannot see. If we can do His will, we will be helping in this process. But we will not necessarily know about it beforehand..."

Like mourning, responding to injustice requires submitting to a process where our desires for the future do not come at the expense of reality. Whatever our political affiliation, it might be good to take time to mourn and reconnect.

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*Editor's note: This homily resource has been re-edited and was originally written for the 4th Sunday of Advent in December of 2017.*