

George Zabelka

Blessing the Bombs

Sixty-nine years ago, as a Catholic Air Force chaplain, Father George Zabelka blessed the men who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Over the next twenty years, he gradually came to believe that he had been terribly wrong, that he had denied the very foundations of his faith by lending moral and religious support to the bombing. Zabelka, who died in 1992, gave this speech on the 40th anniversary of the bombings. He left this message for the world:



The destruction of civilians in war was always forbidden by the Church, and if a soldier came to me and asked if he could put a bullet through a child's head, I would have told him, absolutely not. That would be mortally sinful. But in 1945 Tinian Island was the largest airfield in the world. Three planes a minute could take off from it around the clock. Many of these planes went to Japan with the express purpose of killing not one child or one civilian but of slaughtering hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of children and civilians – and I said nothing.

As a Catholic chaplain I watched as the Boxcar, piloted by a good Irish Catholic pilot, dropped the bomb on Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki, the centre of Catholicism in Japan. I never preached a single sermon against killing civilians to the men who were doing it... It never entered my mind to protest publicly the consequences of these massive air raids. I was told it was necessary – told openly by the military and told implicitly by my Church's leadership.



I worked with Martin Luther King, Jr., during the Civil Rights struggle in Flint, Michigan. His example and his words of nonviolent action, choosing love instead of hate, truth instead of lies, and nonviolence instead of violence stirred me deeply. This brought me face to face with pacifism – active nonviolent resistance to evil. I recall his words after he was jailed in Montgomery, and this blew my mind. He said, “Blood may flow in the streets of Montgomery before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood that flows, and not that of the white man. We must not harm a single hair on the head of our white brothers.”

Related: Looking for Someone to Bomb...



I struggled. I argued. But yes, there it was in the Sermon on the Mount, very clear: “Love your enemies. Return good for evil.” I went through a crisis of faith. Either accept what Christ said, as unpassable and silly as it may seem, or deny him completely.

For the last 1700 years the Church has not only been making war respectable: it has been inducing people to believe it is an honourable profession, an honourable Christian profession. This is not true. We have been brainwashed. This is a lie.

War is now, always has been, and always will be bad, bad news. I was there. I saw real war. Those who have seen real war will bear me out. I assure you, it is not of Christ. It is not Christ’s way. There is no way to conduct real war in conformity with the teachings of Jesus.

The ethics of mass butchery cannot be found in the teachings of Jesus. In Just War ethics, Jesus Christ, who is supposed to be all in the Christian life, is irrelevant. He might as well never have existed. In Just War ethics, no appeal is made to him or his teaching, because no appeal can be made to him or his teaching, for neither he nor his teaching gives standards for Christians to follow in order to determine what level of slaughter is acceptable.

So, the world is watching today. Ethical hair-splitting over the morality of various types of instruments and structures of mass slaughter is not what the world needs from the Church, although it is what the world has come to expect from the followers of Christ. What the world needs is a grouping of Christians that will stand up and pay up with Jesus Christ. What the world needs is Christians who, in language that the simplest soul could understand, will proclaim: the follower of Christ cannot participate in mass slaughter. He or she must love as Christ loved, live as Christ lived, and, if necessary, die as Christ died, loving one's enemies.

For the 300 years immediately following Jesus' resurrection, the Church universally saw Christ and his teaching as nonviolent. Remember that the Church taught this ethic in the face of at least three serious attempts by the state to liquidate her. It was subject to horrendous and ongoing torture and death. If ever there was an occasion for justified retaliation and defensive slaughter, whether in form of a just war or a just revolution, this was it. The economic and political elite of the Roman state and their military had turned the citizens of the state against Christians and were embarked on a murderous public policy of exterminating the Christian community.

Yet the Church, in the face of the heinous crimes committed against her members, insisted without reservation that when Christ disarmed Peter he disarmed all Christians.

Christians continued to believe that Christ was, to use the words of an ancient liturgy, their fortress, their refuge, and their strength, and that if Christ was all they needed for security and defense, then Christ was all they should have. Indeed, this was a new security ethic. Christians understood that if they would only follow Christ and his teaching, they couldn't fail. When opportunities were given for Christians to appease the state by joining the fighting Roman army, these opportunities were rejected, because the early Church saw a complete and an obvious incompatibility between loving as Christ loved and killing. It was Christ, not Mars, who gave security and peace.

Today the world is on the brink of ruin because the Church refuses to be the Church, because we Christians have been deceiving ourselves and the non-Christian world about the truth of Christ. There is no way to follow Christ, to love as Christ loved, and simultaneously to kill other people. It is a lie to say that the spirit that moves the trigger of a flamethrower is the Holy Spirit. It is a lie to say that learning to kill is learning to be Christ-like. It is a lie to say that learning to drive a bayonet into the heart of another is motivated from having put on the mind of Christ. Militarized Christianity is a lie. It is radically out of conformity with the teaching, life, and spirit of Jesus



Now, brothers and sisters, on the anniversary of this terrible atrocity carried out by Christians, I must be the first to say that I made a terrible mistake. I was had by the father of lies. I participated in the big ecumenical lie of the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches. I wore the uniform. I was part of the system. When I said Mass over there I put on those beautiful vestments over my uniform. (When Father Dave Becker

left the Trident submarine base in 1982 and resigned as Catholic chaplain there, he said, "Every time I went to Mass in my uniform and put the vestments on over my uniform, I couldn't help but think of the words of Christ applying to me: Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.")

As an Air Force chaplain, I painted a machine gun in the loving hands of the nonviolent Jesus, and then handed this perverse picture to the world as truth. I sang "Praise the Lord" and passed the ammunition. As Catholic chaplain for the 509th Composite Group, I was the final channel that communicated this fraudulent image of Christ to the crews of the Enola Gay and the Boxcar.

All I can say today is that I was wrong. Christ would not be the instrument to unleash such horror on his people. Therefore, no follower of Christ can legitimately unleash the horror of war on God's people. Excuses and self-justifying explanations are without merit. All I can say is I was wrong! But, if this is all I can say, this I must do, feeble as it is. For to do otherwise would be to bypass the first and absolutely essential step in the process of repentance and reconciliation: admission of error, admission of guilt.

I asked forgiveness from the Hibakushas (the Japanese survivors of the atomic bombings) in Japan last year, in a pilgrimage that I made with a group from Tokyo to Hiroshima. I fell on my face there at the peace shrine after offering flowers, and I prayed for forgiveness – for myself, for my country, for my Church. Both Nagasaki and Hiroshima. This year in Toronto, I again asked forgiveness from the Hibakushas present. I asked forgiveness, and they asked forgiveness for Pearl Harbor and some of the horrible deeds of the Japanese military, and there were some, and I knew of them. We embraced. We cried. Tears flowed. That is the first step of reconciliation – admission of guilt and forgiveness. Pray to God that others will find this way to peace.

Also, by Shane: If it Weren't for Jesus, I Might be Pro-Death Too!

Thank God that I'm able to stand here today and speak out against war, all war. The prophets of the Old Testament spoke out against all false gods of gold, silver, and metal. Today we are worshipping the gods of metal, the bomb. We are putting our trust in physical power, militarism, and nationalism. The bomb, not God, is our security and our strength. The prophets of the Old Testament said simply: Do not put your trust in chariots and weapons but put your trust in God. Their message was simple, and so is mine.

We must all become prophets. I really mean that. We must all do something for peace. We must stop this insanity of worshipping the gods of metal. We must take a stand against evil and idolatry. This is our destiny at the most critical time of human history. But it's also the greatest opportunity ever offered to any group of people in the history of our world – to save our world from complete annihilation.



In his album 'Signs of Hope' Peter Kearney Sings about George.

George Zabelka died in 1992



*I was reading **Benedictus** by John O'Donohue and found these prayers for before and after meals and thought that you might like them to help break the boredom of being shut in at home. I feel they are beautiful so enjoy...*

Blessing Bern

Grace Before Meals

*As we begin this meal with grace,
Let us become aware of the memory
Carried inside the food before us:
The quiver of the seed
Awakening in the earth,
Unfolding in a trust of roots
And slender stems of growth,
On its voyage towards harvest,
The kiss of rain and surge of sun.
The innocence of animal soul
That never spoke a word,
Nourished by the earth
To become today our food.
The work of all the strangers
Whose hands prepared it,
The privilege of wealth and
health
That enables us to feast and celebrate.*



Grace After Meals

*We end this meal with grace
For the joy and nourishment of food,
The slowed time away from the world
To come into presence with each other
And sense the subtle lives behind our faces,
The different colours of our voices,
The edges of hungers we keep private,
The circle of love that unites us.
We pray the wise spirit who keeps us
To change the structures that make others hunger
And that after such grace we might now go forth*

And impart dignity wherever we partake.

Words from Mary of the Cross Mackillop



There where you are,
you will find God. MMK 1871

Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing make you afraid.
All things are passing.
God alone never changes.
Patience gains all things.
If you have God
you will want for nothing.
God alone suffices.

St. Teresa of Avila



I know I was touched by the holy Spirit and felt my heart open on Sunday at the Rite of Election at St Patricks Cathedral. I hope you all enjoyed the day and felt the joy of the Holy Spirit. We continue being a 'work in progress'. But I do hope that something deep within you will also make a connection with 'THE OPEN WINDOW' . . . I was reminded of this poem from Joyce Rupp and want to share it with you all.

(Sophia is considered the feminine part of God. 'Sophia' being the Greek translation of 'Wisdom'.

THE OPEN WINDOW

SHE WILL GUIDE ME PRUDENTLY
IN MY UNDERTAKINGS.
- WISDOM 9:11 (Old Testament)

When Sophia gifts us with truth, she keeps drawing us to the open window of life, where we can fly freely and accept more of the truth of who we truly are.

inside each of us
there awaits a wonder
full
spirit of freedom

she waits
to dance
in the rooms
of our heart
that are closed
dark and cluttered

she waits
to dance
in the spaces
where negative feelings
have built barricades
and stockpiled weapons

she waits
to dance
in the corners
where we still
do not believe in our goodness

inside each of us
there awaits
a wonder
full
spirit of freedom

she will lift light feet
and make glad songs
within us
on the day we open the door of ego
and let the enemies stomp out.



Because Sophia is a “breath of the power of God . . . a reflection of the eternal light . . . more splendid than the sun” (Wisdom 7:25-26,29), she can give light and perspective on the things that stir and struggle in our hearts.)

Joyce Rupp

Forgiveness



Why do we as church speak about God's forgiveness as though His love for us depends on our repentance? God loves us and that's why He sent His Son to teach us about relationship, about how to love and how to forgive. Sometimes I find this whole forgiveness from God difficult to hold, to understand. It's like one great conundrum or a very complicated puzzle. You see I believe very strongly in the love of God, a God who sent in human form his Son to walk the earth, to be a radical teacher of love and compassion. However, he would also be one who would have to go through grief, betrayal, physical and mental torture. He was a man whose friends constantly misunderstood him and would at times question his ways. I never forget that these same friends slept while he was in emotional and spiritual agony.

We know God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to go through all of the above experiences and more, for us, to make life more sacred, more worthwhile enabling us to enter into a deeper more cherished relationship with God and with others.

My struggle to understand having to ask God for forgiveness, a God who created us in God's own image and cannot help but love us, love us with the heart of God who is LOVE, which is well beyond my comprehension. A love that has no beginning and no end, a love that holds more intimacy than a new born baby lying in the arms of its mother immediately after birth, or a toddler holding a mum or dad's face in both their hands telling them that he/she loves you, and, the intimacy of the moment when the long walk down the aisle ends with the holding of hands of a young couple about to proclaim their love for the other on their wedding day. And, even more intimacy than a couple who have been married for 60 years holding hands as they sit together on the veranda on a warm summer's night, no words spoken or music played in the background, they are at home in the presence of the other. All these experiences are of God, YET, still our God how is LOVE, holds more intimacy than all these moments, these experiences together, and still we think we need to ask for forgiveness?

Perhaps for me it's not so much forgiveness! Jesus' life was one of relationship, relationship with the woman at the well, relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus, with the blind man, the women who haemorrhaged, the apostles and the sinners. So, after considerable

reflection and prayer I find myself in a place where my relationship with Jesus is the single most important thing in my life, it is beautiful and it is sacred, it is something I cannot live without. So, the question for me isn't about God loving me, that's a given! It is about making sure my relationship with God is in **right relationship**. A relationship where I am at peace with God. It's about making my relationship with Jesus/God/Spirit right again, if I haven't been the best me, I can be, and therefore I feel I have let my relationship with God down. If I, through lack of thought hurt a friend, I may know that that friend and I will be fine, but, I've hurt them, disappointed them and let them down, we call that sin (remember the word sin means **missing the mark**) **I need** to say sorry, **I need** to fix my own mistakes, my lack of care and or support.

God loves me that's a given but, if I truly want to be in 'right relationship with God then **I need** to talk to God about my behaviour, about the



things I have done that have put my relationship with God a little off course. **I need** to say sorry for my relationship with God to grow in divine beauty, in faith and in a love that is so sacred that words cannot express the depth of its intimacy. Remember always the one thing that never goes off course is *God's love for me*, **it's a Given**.

The freedom and joy of being in right relationship with God!
Please, keep well and take good care of yourselves.
Love and blessings, Bern xoxo

GRATITUDE

To be grateful for what is, instead of underscoring what is not.

To find good amid the unwanted aspects of life, without denying the presence of unwanted.

To focus on beauty in the little things of life, as well as being deliberate about the great beauties or art, literature, music and nature.

To be present to one's own small space of life, while stretching to the wide world beyond it.

To find something to laugh about in every day, even when there seems nothing to laugh about.

To search for and to see the good in others, rather than remembering their faults and weaknesses.

To be thankful for each loving deed done by another, no matter how insignificant it might appear.

To taste life to the fullest, and not take any part of it for granted.

To seek to forgive others for their wrongdoings, even immense ones, and to put the past behind.

To find ways to reach out to others, while preserving their dignity and self-worth.

A Blessing for Healthcare Workers in a Time of Pandemic by Kate Williams

Blessed are the ones who cannot be isolated.

Blessed are the doctors, nurses, chaplains, and hospital staff. Blessed are the hands that are raw from scrubbing and sanitizing, the palms that glisten with oil of healing. Blessed are the shoulders that carry the weight of life and death. Blessed are the feet that are aching from standing at bedside and running between rooms. Blessed are the hearts that are frightened and breaking.

Blessed are the mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, sisters and brothers, partners and friends who cannot go home. Blessed are the families who become isolated from one another, who sacrifice their own comfort so that we need not be alone in our suffering.

Blessed are the sick and dying, those who bear the image of Christ before us. Blessed are those who believe that when part of the Body suffers, we all suffer.

Blessed are those who look upon this sacred work as gift. Blessed are those who have had enough. Blessed are those who are overwhelmed. Blessed are those who lack the space to process all that lies ahead.

Blessed are those who are found weeping in secret corners of an emergency room so that we might see a strong face to meet our need. Blessed are those who weep openly with us, so that even our tears have companions.

Blessed are you, O God: quietly holding each one of us along the way. Come quickly, abide unceasingly. Love us while we see the worst and give us the hope, we need to see our way out.