

**"Upon Reflection . . . " A Message from Fr. Gordon
August 17, 2017**

Responding to last week's rally "Unite the Right"-- a gathering of hate groups in Charlottesville, Virginia that resulted in three deaths and numerous injuries -- former President Barack Obama tweeted remarks once shared by Nelson Mandela while he was president of South Africa. "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion," Mandela observed. "People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love . . . For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Obama's quoted message (which instantly became the most liked tweet in social media history!) affirms what I'm sure all of us want to believe -- that there is inherent goodness in human nature, a divine spark instilled at birth that we can either invigorate or reject, embrace or betray. Like the seed of God's word sown on rocky soil or among briars, as in Jesus' parable, the vagaries of life often determine how well we will receive the truth and how well it will endure within us. The hope is that, with education and experience and the example of others, and even after a lifetime of wrong choices, the hateful heart can be turned and tuned to the ways of love. Mandela believed that, as did Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

This hope is the hope and calling of all Christians. Jesus will not allow us to give up on any soul in whom that divine spark was first kindled and for whom Christ has died. And yet we know, at the same time, that the world is filled with hate, and this perpetuated by hate-filled human beings. We know that such hate, and the oppression and violence that it directs, has visited untold misery on countless individuals and populations throughout history, down to our own time.

From the institutional horror of black chattel slavery to the death and destruction of the Holocaust, from the genocide of indigenous peoples to the cruelty and prejudice shown toward other religions and cultures -- in every generation faithful persons have had to confront, and seek to overcome, the sin that inspires one to demean and violate and subjugate another. Every generation has had to make it their unique calling to beat back this evil with all the moral force and personal courage -- with all the grit and grace - - that one can gather.

Today, right now, in our country, is, I believe, such a time, and we are such a generation. The events of this past weekend have shown us that, while great strides have been made in the areas of racial justice and social understanding, a deep and stubborn root of hatred and bigotry continues to exist. The endemic stain of racism still

exists. The neo-Nazis and white supremacists and KKK members who marched defiantly through the streets of Charlottesville -- and who were met by protesters who rightly and bravely opposed them (including one who lost her life) -- serve as a reminder that the ages-old battle for freedom and justice and equality in this nation and around the world, is not over (was it ever finished?).

Rather, we must take up the fight anew. In word and action, through prayer and peaceful protest, by way of organizational membership and support, through letters and emails and political involvement, informed reading and dialogue among friends and opponents alike, and while keeping ourselves free of hatred and malice -- we must do the work that will make a difference. It is not a time for silence or complacency, or for a "wait-and-see" attitude. We must show others clearly where we stand and what we believe, as Christians and as citizens, as those seeking to speak God's truth and do God's will.

And we ourselves must assume the lead in these efforts. If we don't do this, who else will? Our president has shamefully failed us, falsely equating the proponents of racism and anti-Semitism with those citizens who vigorously oppose these groups and ideologies. In these circumstances, such moral equivalency means tacit acceptance of hatred and murder. To counter this failure, we should make our views known to our state and national representatives. But we should also focus our attention at the local community level, fostering ways for improving the racial and ethnic understanding and peace in the lives closely around us. There are many in our churches and in our city and region who are already working hard toward the fulfillment of these goals; let us join with them.

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul famously declares: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). This basic tenet remains as valid today as it was in the apostle's time. Still, I know how easy it is to become discouraged, given the weight of that evil and the challenge of the task before us -- and when the good seems at the moment so powerless? Yet we must never lose heart. Speaking to young people in South Africa in 1966 (in a country still in the grip of apartheid), Robert Kennedy said this: "It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, that person sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Let us be those ripples of hope, you and I. Let us join in the current of change and moral progress. In the weeks and months ahead, I will share with you names of

organizations and initiatives, learning opportunities and public events in which you may wish to participate (some of these I trust we can host here!). In the meantime, dear sisters and brothers, know that you are in my daily prayers. Please keep me and Kim in yours.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
Fr. Gordon +