

March 1, 2018

My Dear Friends in Christ,

In his First Letter to Timothy, the Pauline writer tells his new and untried helper: "Let no one despise your youth but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (4:12). He is counseling Timothy not to imagine that, just because he's young and untested, he has little to contribute to the leadership of the church. He is saying to him, in effect: 'Let the people see your work and be inspired by your witness. Let them feel the youthful passion of your commitment and calling. Let them rejoice in your courageous love. So let them judge you not on your age but on your gifts.'

I thought of this scripture passage last week, as I watched the teenage survivors of the shootings in Parkland, Florida take to the streets, and the airwaves--and with them many thousands of young people from across the country--to demand action on gun control and gun-related violence. I think many (of us) were as surprised by their poise and articulate response as by their determination. Speaking with a tragic wisdom beyond their years, they declared simply "Enough is enough!" With reason and tearful eloquence, they took lawmakers (and by association the nation) to task for our unwillingness to enact comprehensive, common-sense gun legislation. Already their "example in speech and conduct" has had an effect, with several corporations and retail businesses announcing changes in policy regarding guns in the light of these young persons' moving testimony.

In his address to students in South Africa in 1966, Robert Kennedy declared, "Our answer is the world's hope; it is to rely on youth . . . not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease." He went on to say, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Yet this is the measure of the task of your generation, and the road is strewn with many dangers."

Our young citizens are learning of those inherent dangers at a younger age than many past generations. And yet they are steeling themselves to face that task with both courage and hopefulness. Although they may not frame their struggle in quite these same terms, they are bearing the cross of sacrifice and service that is at the heart of our Christian faith. They are living no longer for themselves alone, but for the God who created them and for the people, yet unborn, who will reap the gifts of their timely efforts.

We would do well--in this season of repentance and renewal, as in every season-- to follow their lead and model their courage. For there can be no better Lenten observance than to listen with attentive respect to our own ever-youthful voice of challenge and daring, the voice and spirit of God's transforming grace reborn each new day in our hearts.

Many blessings,
Fr. Gordon +