

**Reflection–
Liturgy of the Word
Jan. 31, 2020
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Last Friday, the Leadership Council took a trip to the Toledo Museum of Art. We went specifically to see a wonderful display of light – focused on two exhibits. Both of the exhibits were meaningful, yet for different reasons. The first one that we walked through was divided into three areas. In the center of the second room there was a large box suspended from the ceiling with patterns on each side. Inside this box was one light and that one light lit up patterns around the room, including the floor and the ceiling. I couldn't help but think about the words of this past Sunday's Gospel, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "The people in darkness have seen a great light." This one light radiated beauty all around us.

Several weeks ago, we entered into the season of Ordinary Time. Yet, as we look around us and take in all that is going on, it is certainly no ordinary time. During the first weeks of January, Puerto Rico suffered another round of devastation with the earthquakes; the United States attacked Iran and subsequently Iran attacked our bases in Iraq; and the process for impeachment continues. It is within this context that we listen to the readings today and seek meaning in our lives – perhaps finding ways to be that light in the midst of darkness. For all it takes is that one light shining in the darkness.

In the first reading from the Book of Samuel, David seeks what he wants and then finds a way to justify his decision. David destroys the family of one of his trusted warriors. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, is powerless over David. I suppose one could say that David found a way for the end to justify the means, as he marries Bathsheba, making her child legitimate. However, does the end really justify the means?

In Mark's Gospel, a person scatters seeds, trusting in the potential of those tiny seeds to bring forth a harvest. Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. This seed, as we know, is the tiniest of seeds. Yet, within that seed there is potential. The seeds in and of themselves hold the potential for life. The sower witnesses the seed sprouting and growing, yet "He knows not how." In telling this parable, Jesus states, "The land yields fruit." The land provides the nutrients, the place where the potential of the seed comes to fruition. The parable is more about the earth than anything else. What is the land that grounds us, that provides the space we need to grow?

Over this past weekend, I saw the movie, *Just Mercy*. Don't miss this movie. As you may have read, this is a story of a Harvard law school graduate, Bryan Stevenson, who became a civil rights attorney. Bryan founded the Equal Justice Initiative. Throughout the movie we watch as the initiative starts with a two-person staff and continues to grow until the office is fully staffed with individuals who are dedicated to working with the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned. The land of Alabama, where the office is

located, does not nurture the seeds of justice. Rather, as in the story of David, the law enforcement agency of Montgomery finds a way to have the end justify the means as individuals are wrongly accused and put on death row.

Bryan Stevenson finds the good earth, tends the soil so that justice can be obtained for the individuals wrongly accused. He is that one light shining in the darkness. Over time, the Equal Justice Initiative assists more than 100 individuals who were wrongly convicted.

How do we ground ourselves in the good earth? Can we plant seeds of justice in that earth and trust that they will sprout and yield a bountiful harvest? Like the mustard seed, even little actions can lead to results. The good soil of seeking the kingdom of God produces fruit by an internal power. The focus of the Gospel and of our lives is the transforming power of the earth itself. Let us listen to the word of God, planting seeds within that earth, trusting that the seeds will flourish.