

Reflection

June 3, 2020

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Today, the Church celebrates the memorial of St. Charles Lwanga and companions – also referred to as the Ugandan Martyrs. Between 1885-1887, the ruthless ruler in Buganda – now part of Uganda – ordered the brutal murder of young royal pages. They were young men – boys, both Anglican and Catholic. Their offense was the refusal of the immoral advances of the leader.

Our sisters who served in Uganda would have heard their stories and may have seen the shrine to the Ugandan Martyrs, dedicated in 1975. They may have heard the story of the boy Kizito, perhaps only 9 years old when martyred. And, most likely they knew men and boys named Kizito. If you do a search under that name, you will find, not only the story, but pictures of numerous schools and parishes, named in his honor, and you'll hear the melodious, rhythmic harmonies of numerous young choirs.

There are no special readings for the feast, and we have returned to “ordinary” time (liturgically speaking). But, in today's first reading from Paul's second letter to Timothy, the events and messages flow together.

Paul writes: “I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God.... For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.” Paul was training Timothy as a missionary and evangelizer. He urged him to use the gift of power in speech, to convince others, to make the Good News of Jesus Christ appealing.

Surely the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in today's readings are, in fact, gifts for our day: power ... love ... self-control.

Power—what image does this word evoke? here is power that generates energy: water power, wind power, solar power. Paul was using the power of speech to communicate the power of the Word. He wanted the Word to empower his hearers to embrace the Gospel and become followers of Jesus Christ.

Love—Like power, love is a word with many meanings and with tremendous power. As we think about these days, we continue to see the sustaining power of love on the part of health care workers, spending long hours at their own risk to heal. Love also shows another kind of healing power. St. Francis tells us, where there is hatred, let us sow love.

In these days of turmoil, anger, frustration and hatred, we are not always shown the acts of love and compassion, but they are there. I was touched by the image of the Minneapolis police chief being interviewed on the street. George Floyd's relatives were in a studio, connected with a view of the street. Floyd's mother asked the chief how he felt, viewing the picture of her son's death. Before trying to say anything, he looked

toward the mother and simply took off his hat. It was, I believe, an image speaking louder than words.

Self-Control—This is the third gift Paul mentions in today’s reading. In these days, we have seen many images of what self-control is and is not. We have seen raw use of power and we have seen remarkable scenes of self-control ... control of anger, rage, frustration, of the urge to injure and to hurt. We have heard patient, caring words in place of hate speech.

Paul was encouraging Timothy in the context of early anti-Christian hostility. Each age has its own challenges calling for the gifts of the Spirit: first century anti-Christian challenges; 19th century moral challenges, such as that seen in Uganda; 21st century challenges that include racial hatred. In every era, we call upon the Spirit of Christ to bring power, love and self-control.

At the end of today’s reading, we have Paul’s expression of the source of his confidence: “I know him in whom I have believed and am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.” Power ... Love ... Self-control.

And so, in these days, we ask ourselves:

- With what gifts have I been entrusted?
- How can I stir into flame the gifts I have received?