

Testimony



A Pamphlet from Pax Christi Texas

Anticipating February 27, 2022

Communications with the editor should be sent to j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After the calendar, the Sunday Liturgical Reading reflections are based on the readings for the Eighth Week of Ordinary Time. The late Tom Keene's poem is *Dia de los Muertos*. For more of Tom's poems, see <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php>.

Tom died at age 86 January 29, and this past Wednesday (February 16) Pax Christi San Antonio held an informal memorial service online in his memory. I have found a file in my computer labeled "Keene stories"; following the poem is one of the items I found in that file—a letter to the editor of a poetry magazine. Finally, I offer my own reflection in celebration of the life of such an inspiring human.

Calendar

Times are given for the Central Time Zone.

Tuesday February 22, 6:00pm, online "Beyond the Left & Right: Mapping Ideology for a Better Kind of Politics," Jason Blakely (Pepprdine University), Melissa Cedillo (*National Catholic Reporter*), and Mūmbi Kīgūtha (Pan-African Catholic theology and Pastoral Network), moderated by Emily Davis (Catholic Theological Union). Register at: <https://ctu.edu/event/beyond-the-left-right-mapping-ideology-for-a-better-kind-of-politics/>

Wednesday February 23, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "Women in Ministry: What About the Diaconate?" Phyllis Zagano (Hofstra University). Information at: <https://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/colleges--schools/college-of-arts--sciences/departments/catholic-studies/center-for-catholic-studies-spring-speaker-series/>

Wednesday February 23, 9:00am-10:00am (10:00am-11:00am ET) online "Assessing the Russia-Ukraine Crisis," Anastasiya Leukhina (Kyiv School of Economics, Ukraine), Larisa Deriglazova (Tomsk State University, Russia), and Kristina Hook (Kennesaw State University, U.S.A.), moderated by George A. Lopez (University of Notre Dame). Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fs9SSR1oQGac1LDQ_J9iwA

Wednesday February 23, 7:00pm-8:00pm online Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty membership meeting. Register at:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeMcPfsnWvWSjOz0sKvjMsL5pLJOg4Q0F__xiWoeXg5k8GZzQ/viewform

Thursday February 24, 11:00am-12:00pm (12:00pm-1:00pm ET) online "Our Shared Paths to Justice: Learning from Desmond Tutu's Faith and Activism," Ellen Clark-King (King's College, London), Laurie Nathan (University of Notre Dame), and A. Rashid Omar (University of Notre Dame), moderated by Charles Powell (University of Notre Dame). Register at:
https://notredame.zoom.us/webinar/register/6016438293197/WN_5LyDkLjFTx2j fFlksItPUQ

Saturday February 26, 9:00am-2:00pm, online, Texas Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty annual conference. The keynote address will be given by Sister Helen Prejean. There will be four concurrent breakout sessions, as well as a panel discussion on successful abolition efforts in other states: LaKeisha Cook (Virginia), Rep. Robert Renny Cushing (New Hampshire), and Denis Maes (Colorado). Prices vary by category: \$50 to \$90. Register at: <https://tcadp.org/tcadp-2022-annual-conference-registration/>

Tuesday March 1, 6:30pm, online "Vietnamese-American Catholics...or American-Vietnamese Catholics?" Peter Phan (Georgetown University). Register at:
<http://PeterPhan.eventbrite.com>

Wednesday March 2, 6:00pm (7:00pm ET) online "Women's Ordination and the Synodal Church" KateMcElwee (Women's Ordination Conference) and Heidi Schlumpf (National Catholic Reporter). Information at:
<https://www.sacredheart.edu/academics/colleges--schools/college-of-arts-->

sciences/departments/catholic-studies/center-for-catholic-studies-spring-speaker-series/

Friday March 11, 8:00am-9:00am, "Sunday Morning Social Constructions of Racial Problems and Solutions from American Protestant Gigachurches," Melissa Denton (University of Texas San Antonio). Register at:
https://events.rice.edu/#!/view/event/date/20220311/event_id/261774

Saturday March 12, 1:00pm (11:00am Pacific), online "The Nonviolence of St. Francis and St. Claire," Ken Butigan (DePaul University). Register by March 8 at:
<https://beatitudescenter.org/>

Saturday April 9, 11:30am-2:00pm (12:30pm-3:00pm ET) online "White Supremacy and American Christianity," Robert Jones (Public Religion Research Institute), Bryan Massingale (Fordham University), and Marcia Chatelain (Georgetown University). Register at:
<https://networklobby.org/uschristianityconvo/>

In Austin

Thursday February 24, 6:00pm-8:30pm, Community Engagement Meeting Hosted by the Austin Police Department. Holy Cross Church Family Life Center, 1110 Concho St., Austin.

First Reading (Sirach 27:4-7)

The *Book of Sirach*, also known as *Ecclesiasticus*, argued that wisdom is to be found in the Jewish religious tradition. In the secular world rationality exists, but as excellent as it is there is more to right thinking than rationality. Rationality is instrumental: In order to obtain a given result, it identifies what one might do. Left alone, rationality could lead one to ruthless courses of action. Wisdom, in contrast, evaluates both the quality of one's action and that of the aims and objectives one may entertain. It (or its absence) reflects the excellence of the person who engages in the action. In the passage from the lectionary, the focus is on the use of speech.

Second Reading (First Corinthians 15:54-58)

In this brief excerpt from *First Corinthians*, Paul gives his response to the thought of death followed by imperishability and immortality: “Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?”

Recently, at a meeting of the local chapter of the Texas Coalition against the Death Penalty, someone related the true story of a priest who had been murdered. Among his papers they found a signed statement that if murdered, he did not want the person who would kill him to face the death penalty. Indeed, what victory for death?

Third Reading (Luke 6.39-45)

The Sermon on the Plain, Luke’s parallel to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, began with the Beatitudes and continued with a number of sayings that people remembered as being typical of Jesus. Here Luke includes a number of short teachings that also appear in the *Gospel of Matthew* and in the non-canonical sayings-gospel known as the *Gospel of Thomas*, which was discovered in Egypt in 1945. The passage centers on the theme of insight, which spiritual writers call “discernment.”

Can the blind lead the blind? If you have a splinter in your own eye, how can you remove a splinter from someone else’s eye? How can a briar bush produce good fruit? From the mouth comes the overflow of the heart.

These sayings have an obvious relevance to individual conduct. A person lacking introspective insight can hardly understand or advise another. In fact, a lack of insight about oneself often develops into projection, where a greedy person understands others as greedy too, and a selfish person believes other also to be selfish. And we can only wonder how any one of us, so often lacking self-insight as we do, might misconstrue God.

However, we are not isolated particles in an unlit sky. Our insights and thinking reflect the insights and thought of others who came before us, who now surround us, and whose dreams of the future pull us. And if each one person—past, present, or future—is faulty in self-understanding, how much more faulty is our civilization-wide summation of error! Don’t nations with histories of prejudice and discrimination claim to be democratic, open, and egalitarian? The nineteenth-century critics of democracy spoke, perhaps unfairly, of a crowd mentality which would always and inevitably sink to the lowest common denominator. This was an

erroneous condemnation of societies because people are not equally influential; there are influentials who can rise above moral mediocrity, take a wider view of the world, and raise others up as well. The point is to be one of them.

Poem

Dia de los Muertos

Wake and rise, all of us,
all forgotten souls,
sweep our craven selves
from the corners of our crypts
into the sunlit cemetery,
toward the grotto aflame with flowers,
candles and food.

Behold the shaman/priest,
hear his bold bellows echo down Hades' halls
to shake the roots of our indifference,
cut open the cocoons we wove in life.

Hear the heartbeat of the drum,
the plaintive mantras from the mandolin's mouth,
dance the litanies chanted to North and South, East and West
to rouse the bowels of memory in the Father-creator,
in the Holy Mother and all the saints,
that they may waken in us the Receptive Spirit,
the Beginning and the End of our being.

See the breads, sweet with life,
fresh from the fires of ovens.
Let us gather them in our skeletal frames
and remember the food we forgot to share.
Let us gorge ourselves on grace
and with it feed the worms that eat our isolation.

Look how the living proceed in a circle
to prophesy our completion.

Come, fuse our smoky souls
to the grey curls of incense
and with them ride the autumn winds to clouds
to wait the dawning of our destinies.

Tom Keene

A native American rendering of Dia de Los Muertos on November 1, 1991, Our Lady of the Lake cemetery and grotto. With thanks to Dr. Bernardino Verastique and his acolytes.

Letter to an Editor by Tom Keene

As a co-editor, I sent this letter to the editor of a local poetry magazine. I feel it may speak to some of the people that constitute our network of activists. I give this piece a title: Poetry and Conscience.

*Blessings,
Tom*

January 24, 2008

Dear _____,

We have a problem. On page 23 of the recent issue of our magazine we have a poem from a soldier. It reads "...a soldier fought today for freedom and for right...today I am free because a soldier fought today...a HERO died today." Next to the poem is a call by editors for more poems from and to our soldiers.

When I read the page, I was sadly reminded of the sentiments reflected in so many letters to the editor of our daily paper, and then put the thought aside. The real import of that page came to me when a friend thrust the magazine at me. She was livid. She said, "You are an editor. Why is this in here?" Her question moved me to ask myself, How accountable am I? Thus, this letter.

I have long been troubled by how we are encouraged to refer to soldiers, especially those suffering from wounds, as heroes. I consider whether the German people believe Hitler's soldiers to be heroes. I imagine most do not, but

surely some do. Are those who do letting themselves be fooled by the demons of nationalism and “Deutschland Uber Alles?”

Our simplistic “support the troops” mentality betrays our American conscience by its failure to understand the difference between heroism and tragedy. Tragedy is when good intentions or good character are betrayed whether by self or other. Heroism is when someone goes into danger and brings back something of value to the community. Despite our soldiers’ bravery and dedication the word for them is not heroes. The word is victims, a word that cries out for accountability, not from the soldiers, but from the perpetrators of their victimhood. That is what poems in The Poet should address.

As an 18 year-old in 1953, volunteering for the U.S. Army paratroops during the Korean War, I was a “patriot” in my intent to fight for freedom and democracy for South Koreans. But in the harsh light of history, I know I was fooled. (Under president Syngman Rhee, and for over thirty years after, South Koreans had no political freedom or democracy. They had dictatorship backed by U.S. military and diplomacy, but that is another story waiting to be told by poets to a reluctant America.) My point is that heroism does not consist of being fooled by one’s government.

Heroes bring home something good. Our wounded warriors bring back to our communities torn bodies and shattered psyches, conditions that cry out to citizens and to poets for healing, not self-serving lies. Calling our soldiers heroes is not a healing truth. Calling victims heroes has no place in poetry. Poetry is not anesthesia for a nation’s collective distress. It is a wakeup call to face the roots of our common pain.

My friend’s words of truth call for a reckoning by the individuals and the collective that constitute our poetry magazine, an agonizing reappraisal of what we are doing and what we are about. Should we fail to reappraise, for fear of appearing “unpatriotic” or for whatever reason, we will have betrayed ourselves, not just as citizens, but betrayed the very meaning of poetry.

For Tom Keene
Anthony J. Blasi

O Tom!

I know you are listening and watching. Poet and prophet that you are, you hear and see the little marks of divinity that the Creator traces in our world. You do not

speak of conclusions and propositions, but of those little marks that we might otherwise overlook. You point them out to us, so that we too might discover the great in the small and marvel for ourselves over what it all means.

You thought you might slip away unnoticed. Who can blame you? The final ceremonies walk us through it all, wary of the spontaneity of the spirit. The obituary reads like a census form or a genealogy. That is not your way.

I know, your ears no longer vibrate with the clatter of our syllables, and your optic nerves no longer make color and form present to your portion of the human world's gray matter. But you do attend to us, those for whom you have a special care. As always, your soul relishes the joint enlightenment we share with you. For sure, the form is not the same, but the essence persists. *Vita mutatur, non tollitur.*

So not with rigid ritual and published personal data, but with a warm feeling in our heart, you extend revelation, you continue to do God's work in our world.

Other Links

Pax Christi International

<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.

<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas

<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

Catholic Books Review
<http://catholicbooksreview.org>

Beloved Community Project
<http://belovedcommunityproject.org/>