

September 11, 2016
24th Sunday in Ordinary time

Mine, O God, is a contrite heart; a heart contrite and humbled you will not spurn

It was only when we have wept that we are able to confess our sin

They have wept

Israel wept when she had strayed from the path God was showing her; the younger son wept when he realized he had shamed his father; we weep when we realize we have betrayed someone we love.

We need to weep

There is a sin our church committed in the past for which she has yet to weep. Looking back at it is not about condemning her for doing so; it is about her offering healing and asking for forgiveness from those she offended.

The Doctrine of Discovery

There is a report titled, “The Doctrine of Discovery,” by Vinnie Rotondaro, which was printed in the *National Catholic Reporter* in August 28, 2015. This is a brief from that report.

“Most of us know something of the poor treatment of Native Americans in this country – the history of imperialism, the suffering and suicide that exist among Indians today. But not many of us know that there has long been a dehumanizing rationale for conquerors and rulers that had its roots in papal statements, known as ‘*Papal Bulls*,’ issued in the 1400’s. In time, these Papal Bulls grew into an international norm known as the ‘*Doctrine of Discovery*,’ which played a crucial role in justifying European claims in the Americas, and inspired U.S. western expansion.

“The Doctrine of Discovery holds immense importance in world history. It resulted in disaster and genocide for native peoples, but its legacy remains largely overlooked. Racism coursed through the doctrine and the Bulls that informed it, but its origins were ultimately political, stemming from the Vatican trying to come to terms with the discovery of the new world and trying to head off massive wars between Spain and Portugal over gold.

“The first Bull of consequence, *Romanus Pontifex*, was issued in 1494. It concerned the concession of the right of domination over the Guanches people and the Canary Islands. This Bull marks the first time the papacy made it look as though no one was living there, or had any ownership over the land being pursued by European powers, because there were no Christians there. That pattern of thought then began its march through history. These developments represented the beginnings of international law.

“In 1452, a Papal Bull, *Dum Diversas*, instructed the Portuguese crown ‘to invade, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ, to put them into a perpetual slavery, and to take away all their possessions and property.’

“In 1454, another Bull, *Romanus Pontifex*, furthered the thinking, sanctifying the seizure of non-Christian lands and parts of Africa, and restating the legitimacy of enslaving non-Christian people.

“In 1493 after Columbus's voyage, a Bull, *Inter Caetera*, granted Ferdinand and Isabella ‘full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction a very kind’ over non-Christians in the new land. It declared that ‘the Christiana faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.’

“This Bull and others like it gave license to the domination of native peoples, arguing that because they were not Christian, they lacked human rights. Instead of being treated like human beings, native peoples were said to have been “discovered,” like some new species of animal. More Papal Bulls followed doing the same.

“In 1823, a turning point was reached in the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Native Americans, referred to as ‘fierce savages’ and ‘the conquered,’ had the right to occupy land, but not have full sovereignty. It stipulated that tribes were dependent on the federal government. This became the cornerstone of U.S. Federal Indian law.

“The result today of these doctrines is that poverty and inequality are rampant among the Indian Nations. The suicide rate is off the map, including people under the age of 25. Medical missionary, Sr. Catherine Balthasar, says that she regularly deals with a psychological phenomenon called ‘*historical trauma*’ - a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.

“In November 2013, the Sisters of Loretto community sent a letter to Pope Francis calling on him to ‘*formally and publicly repudiate and rescind*’ the Doctrine of Discovery.

“In 2009, the Episcopal Church repudiated the doctrine of discovery. In 2012, the Unitarian Universalist Association followed suit, including the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, the World Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, to name a few.

“But the Vatican has yet to publicly address Catholicism’s role in bringing about the Doctrine of Discovery or revoke the Papal Bulls that articulated it. Pope Francis recently did ‘*ask for forgiveness in South America not only for the offenses of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.*’”

Our church has yet to weep for her sins against native peoples around the world

Pope Francis notes that "*Christ wept when he understood the depth of their need. Those who suffer need not only help, but tears. Today's world needs to weep,*" he said. Native peoples have been marginalized; they have been left aside; they have been scorned; they have suffered -- and they weep.

When a little girl asked Francis on one of his trips why we suffer, he said, "*to learn to weep.*" He points to Jesus in the Gospels. "*He wept for his dead friend; he wept in his heart for that family that had lost its daughter; he wept in his heart when he saw the poor widow taking her son to be buried; he wept in his heart when he saw the multitudes like sheep without a shepherd; he wept over Jerusalem for not letting him help them.*"

Our church needs to weep for her sins against native peoples
to offer healing to them as well as seek forgiveness.

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