

## Good Friday Reflection (FINAL) Lienesch, 4.15.22

On this Good Friday, I find myself thinking about a ritual called the ¡Presente! litany. It is a traditional ritual, thought to be hundreds of years old, practiced in Central and Latin America, to honor those who have died, and especially those who have died as a result of violence, injustice, or oppression. Beginning around 1990, in response to civil wars in Central America, the liturgy was brought to this country by antiwar Catholic nuns and priests, who have continued to practice it, remembering those who have suffered and died as a result of political persecution throughout the world.

The liturgy is simple but powerful. A lone person speaks or sings out the names, one by one, of those who have been killed, and after each name, those around them responds with one single word in Spanish: "Presente." Or, in English, "Here" or "present."

In this ritual, the word "presente," used over and over again during what is often an hours-long litany, is one that carries two meanings.

In calling themselves "present," the people announce their presence and witness to the suffering and death of those who have been killed. They testify that they are present to the violence and that they remember those who have died.

The word "presente" also affirms the presence of the people who have been killed, announcing that they, too, are present in this place, even beyond death. Archbishop Oscar Romero, before he was killed by a national police squad in El Salvador in 1989 said, "As a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If I am murdered, I will arise again in the Salvadoran people." "Presente" carries with it this meaning as well – that the dead are still with us in our memories and our lives.

Thinking of this "Presente" litany on Good Friday is helpful to me because this is a day when I often find myself at a loss.

Perhaps you do, too.

What is it, exactly, that we are we to do with Good Friday?

How are we to feel and to respond as we listen to the passion narrative, a devastatingly detailed account of brutality, violence, and death?

What is our role as people in the pews in the year 2022 as we remember the deeply painful of Jesus' trial and execution?

And I wonder, as I ask myself these questions, if the "Presente" litany -- this act of roll call and witness -- is, perhaps, one answer to the question, "what are we to do with Good Friday?"

Perhaps today we are invited into the act of presence.

We are invited to be present at the painful death of Jesus. The three women -- the three Marys -- who stood at the cross and were witness to Jesus' death -- show us what this presence might look like. They were unable to prevent Jesus' torture and death. But they were there, present, sharing in his suffering, assuring him that he would not die alone, protesting his death, and promising that his life, his memory, and his teachings would be carried on. They were present.

We are invited to be present with those who are suffering in our world today -- in Ukraine, in Afghanistan, in all places plagued by violence.

We are invited to be present with those suffering in our own lives. To stand beside them and be present with them as they struggle.

On this Good Friday, though we know we cannot relieve all the suffering in the world, we can be present. We can bear witness to the suffering of Jesus and those who suffer in our world today.

Because in doing so, in being present, in confirming that we are "here," we are both enacting AND receiving Jesus' love for the world. We are present, and in us and around us, God's love is also here.

We are affirming, even on the most painful day of the liturgical year, and even in these deeply violent times in our world, that our presence is a sign of God's love in the world, and that we are always and forever, loved by Jesus Christ.

"Presente."

*Amen.*