



## MARTIN LUTHER KING: A NATIONAL DAY

By Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

**T**he United States celebrates an important person in its history this week.

Martin Luther King was a man of vision, a man who dreamed a dream that many people thought was impossible. When legislated, blatant racism was acceptable to most, he stood prophetically in the midst of the people and said "NO!" (He reminded us that everything that is legal is not always just nor Christian.)

Many people thought Martin Luther King was a trouble-maker and that if he were ignored, he would just go away. Because his dream had a firm base in the Word of God, neither he nor his dream could be easily dismissed.

This dream is supposed to become reality!

We cannot continue to think that it would be nice if it came about, we must commit ourselves to bringing it about. As the Church gathers to worship, the very prayers we use remind us that all are made in

God's image, that all are brothers and sisters, and that nothing should divide us or make us distrust and hate one another.

*There comes a time when a moral man can't obey a law which his conscience tells him is unjust. And the important thing is that when he does that, he willingly accepts the penalty-because if he refuses to accept the penalty, then he becomes reckless, and eh becomes an anarchist. There are those individuals in every age and generation who were willing to say, "I will be obedient to a higher law."*

*We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.*



*Dear Friend of the Missions,*

*Happy New Year! May 2007 be a year of grace, peace and blessing for you and your loved ones. As January begins the Christmas Mystery is still celebrated: January 1 is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Of course, it is the beginning of the new year and it is a day of prayer for world peace. January 7 is the Solemnity of the Epiphany, and January 8 brings the Christmas season to a close with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. January 18-25 is the Week of Prayer from Church Unity. January 22 is designated a day of prayer and penance to seek an end to sins against life. The third Monday in January (this year, January 15) is Martin Luther King Day. In many parts of the world where our missionaries work there is no peace, peoples are divided because of racism and religious differences, and life is not appreciated. Keep these places in your prayer this month. Thank you for your generosity to the missions.*

*God bless and keep you all!*

Hearing those prayers over and over should help us to embrace that dream anew, seek forgiveness for the mistakes we have made in the past and present and commit ourselves again to God's way. The words we use to praise God are the words we should use to guide our lives.

*In Christ there is no east or west  
In him no north or south  
But one great family bound by love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

(Hymn based on Gal 3,28 by John Oxenham, Copyright: American Tract Society)

**YOU FORMED US IN YOUR OWN LIKENESS (Eucharistic Prayer IV).** The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace published the instruction: "The Church and Racism: Toward a more Fraternal Society," which condemns racism because it goes against all that God has revealed. "**Faith in the one God. Creator and Redeemer of all humankind made in his image and likeness, constitutes the absolute and inescapable negation of any racist ideologies**" (Par. 19).

Made in the image and likeness of God we are of the same family and have the same origin. No matter how we differ, or where we come from, we are destined to form one family. When we call upon God as Father, we are acknowledging that we are all brothers and sisters. To the extent that we pray this in our churches and do not practice this in our lives, we must admit that we sin and seek repentance.

*In him shall true hearts everywhere  
Their high communion find;  
His service is the golden cord  
Close binding humankind.*

*Now let me say that the next thing we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth and good will toward men is the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life. Every man is somebody because he is a child of God.*

**SEE THE VICTIM WHO HAS RECONCILED US TO YOURSELF (Eucharistic Prayer II).** All divisions are overcome by

*I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made. No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are interdependent.*

the Cross of Christ. Because of Christ's saving activity, NO section of humanity can boast that it is superior. The diversity of humanity, which we have often used to separate and segregate, must be recognized as part of God's wisdom.

In creating us, God has made a beautiful mosaic. We all complement one another; we reflect each others image of God and we are joined together in Christ. Thus we **BECOME ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT IN CHRIST.**

*Join hands disciples in the faith,  
Whate'er your race may be!  
Who serve each other in Christ's love  
Are surely kin to me.*

**GATHER PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE, LANGUAGE AND WAY OF LIFE. (Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation II).** The Church strives to realize this unity in itself so that it might proclaim to the world a new order where people live in peace and mutual respect. This is a challenge for all of

*True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice. True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.*

*The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows*



the Church's members and for the Church as an institution to put aside all prejudices and stereotypes to embrace the vision of the world that God gave us in the

very beginning. In our worship we proclaim that God, the Lord of history, is restoring justice for the mistakes of our past, but we are also committing ourselves to seeing that justice and love are not lost today or tomorrow.

*In Christ now meet both east and west  
In him meet south and north  
All Christly souls are one in him  
Throughout the whole wide world.*

Dr. King's "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 captured people's hearts. So many times it seemed like a dream impossible. But he never stopped dreaming and slowly, ever so slowly God's grace has been accepted and the dream becomes more real in every age. Let us all have the courage to dream the dream of the Gospel and work to make that dream become reality. This is the kingdom of God that we await, but that we must also work to establish. It is ours to work at with God and to pass the task on to those

*We must accept finite disappointments, but we must never lose infinite hope.*

*One of the most agonizing problems within our human experience is that few, if any, of us live to see our fondest hopes fulfilled. The hopes of our childhood and the promises of our mature years are unfinished symphonies.*

who follow after us. Then they might work together, and with God, to continue to build the kingdom. Here is one last challenge from Dr. King: *The belief that God will do everything for us is as untenable as the belief that we can do everything for ourselves. It, too, is based on lack of faith. We must learn that to expect God to do everything while we do nothing is not faith but superstition.*

(Quotes in the boxes taken from "The Words of Martin Luther King" selected by Coretta Scott King. Newmarket Press, 1983)

### Reflection Questions:

1. How do you react when you encounter injustice?
2. Do you believe that peace and reconciliation are the best way?
3. Do you believe that you are called to work with God to establish God's kingdom?

## PLEASE REMEMBER OUR MISSIONARIES WHO CELEBRATE THEIR BIRTHDAYS THIS MONTH:

**Bishop Capistran Heim, O.F.M. (Brazil); January 21**  
**Fr. Pius Liu, O.F.M. (Taiwan): January 24**  
**Fr. David Babcock, O.F.M. (Brazil): January 26**  
**Deacon Henry Fulmer, O.F.M. (Southern U.S.): January 30**  
**Fr. Paul Osborne, O.F.M. (Brazil): January 31**

O God, be gracious to our brothers and  
bless them and keep them safe!.

## PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR MISSIONARIES AND FORMER MISSIONARIES WHO ARE ILL:

**Brazil: Bishop Benedict Coscia, O.F.M., Fr. Thomas Fox, O.F.M., Br. Rosario Vieira, O.F.M., Fr. Charles Finnegan, O.F.M. and Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M.**  
**Japan: Fr. Camion Lally, O.F.M.**  
**Africa: Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M.**  
**Jamaica: Fr. Clement Healy, O.F.M.**  
**Southern U.S.: Fr. Arthur Murray, O.F.M.**

**Please remember in a special way Fr. Charles Steen, O.F.M. who died on Dec. 18. He served in Bolivia and Africa. May he rest in peace!**