

Deacon Jim's Corner

A Letter from Our Pastoral Coordinator May 26, 2019



May Christ's peace, joy and hope be with you all!

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

A number of years ago, I became familiar with the story of the 7 Trappist monks who were murdered by extremists in Northern Algeria from a book, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, by John Kiser, published in 2003. Their story was popularized by the acclaimed 2010 movie, *Of Gods and Men*. The monastery was located on the hill above the small town of Tibhirine, about 60 miles from Algiers, in the coastal Atlas Mountains. Of the 7 monks, the most famous was their Abbot, Fr. Christian de Chergé O.S.C.O. (Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance). May 21, 1996 is the anniversary of their martyrdom. On December 8, 2018, these 7 monks along with other Algerian martyrs, were beatified at the Catholic Church in Oran, in Algeria. Pope Francis has supported their cause for sainthood.

I bring this up because I believe that Fr. Christian had a relatively unique perspective in his religious life. As a former French soldier in Algeria years earlier, a Muslim friend saved his life. "When the pair were walking, they were ambushed by a squad of Algerian rebels. De Chergé, wearing his army fatigues, was sure his end had come. Then Mohammed, stepped in between his friend and the attackers and told them to leave de Chergé alone: "He is a godly man."

Amazingly, they let both men go. But this act of bravery cost Mohammed his life: he was found murdered in the street the next day. The episode gripped de Chergé for days—and completely changed his life. He decided to commit himself to God and to the cause of peace. When his tour of duty ended, he returned to France and entered a Trappist monastery. Later he studied to become a priest and asked to be transferred to an Algerian base" (Johann Christoph Arnold. *Plough* website).

From that point forward, Fr. Christian devoted himself to finding a way to work for deeper understanding and peace between the Muslims and Christians. He and the monks of his community lived that out in their relationship with the native inhabitants of Tibhirine. Instead of trying to convert them, they focused on loving and serving them. That approach bore much fruit and intimacy with the town.

Today, whether it's in our relationship with one another, in our faith community, in our nation or in our relations with other countries, we often find ourselves at odds with others for all kinds of reasons. Our separation from one another sometimes leads to a type of verbal and relational violence. We gossip, tear one another down, and distance ourselves as we cite our differences as the source of that disunity.

Fr. Christian de Chergé, Pope Francis, and so many women and men before us, not to mention Jesus himself, provide us with an alternative to our division, enmity, and disunity. We are called by Christ Jesus to seek what unites us rather than what divides us in the living out of our faith. Jesus' response to the unjust violence brought against him was to forgive his persecutors and pray for them.

This close of the Easter season is the opportune time for all of us, even in our weakness, to recommit to be more and more like Our Lord in the living out of our faith in the world

In God's great love, hope and mercy,

Deacon Jim

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deacon Jim". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deacon Jim Fish, Pastoral Coordinator
Holy Rosary and Visitation parishes
Archdiocese of Seattle