
LETTER FROM THE RABBI

This evening was the annual Yom haShoah u'Gevurah, Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day commemoration at Temple Sinai. This annual commemoration is very difficult for me, but I feel an obligation as a Jew and as a Rabbi to attend every year. As trying as it is, this year I was honored to be asked to introduce survivors as they lit the candles to remember the victims.

This most important part of the program tonight was the guest speaker, Jim McGarry, founder and first director of the Helen and Joe Farkas Center for the Study of Holocaust in Catholic Schools. He is also is a Taube Fellow in Religious Studies specializing in Ethics, Social Justice and Holocaust Studies.

Jim McGarry spoke primarily about the need for Catholics to learn the lessons of the Shoah, and especially those who stood silently by and did nothing to prevent or hinder the slaughter. I was amazed to hear him say that the 26,500 plus righteous gentiles honored at Yad VaShem Holocaust center in Jerusalem, represented only 1% of the population of Nazi occupied Europe.

However to me the most important part of Jim McGarry's presentation came when he repeatedly quoted the prophet Isaiah 16:3:

ג הַבִּיאוּ (הַבְּיִאֵי) עֲצָה עֲשׂוּ פְּלִילָה,
שִׁיתִי כְּלִיל צֶלֶל בְּתוֹךְ צְהָרִים ; סְתָרִי,
נְדָחִים--נִדָּד, אֶל-תִּגְלֵי.
3 'Give counsel, execute justice; make thy shadow as
the night in the midst of the noonday; **hide the
outcasts; betray not the fugitive.**

“Hide the outcasts; betray not the fugitive,” he emphasized several times. Jim McGarry wants his students specifically, and Catholics in general, to learn from the Shoah and apply the lessons to current events. He warned against current anti-Semitism, homophobia, racism, islamophobia and xenophobia.

“Hide the outcasts; betray not the fugitive.” It still rings in my ears and pulls on my heartstrings. Am I doing enough to be among the ‘righteous Jews’ who protected the vulnerable of my own age?

I still believe with all of my heart that the United States of 2017 is not Germany of 1938. Our cultures are very different. Our population is much more diverse and our citizens much more individualistic and we are much less likely to blindly follow a demagogue, even if one should rise to power. But writing that, I want to declare clearly that we must be ever vigilant, so that no one in the future will have a commemoration of our lives, not as victims and not as perpetrators.

Respectfully,
Rabbi Harry A Manhoff, PHD