

It's just after 5 am on a dark October morning in Richmond and 30 some pilgrims from across the Diocese of Virginia are starting off on a bus bound for Memphis. Bishop Mark Stevenson came to pray us out, we sang Lead Me, Guide Me Lord, on the Way, and off we went. Marjy and I are looking forward to whatever the Holy Spirit chooses to reveal to us over the next six days. We will try to share with you what we are learning and experiencing.

End of LONG first day. 16 hours after taking off in Richmond, we arrived at St Columba's in Memphis for dinner and a nice room for the night. We're still thinking about the liturgy created for our Evening Prayer. One bit in particular stood out to me: Show me my own complicity I injustice. CONVICT ME FOR MY INDIFFERENCE. Forgive me when I have remained silent. EQUIP ME WITH A ZEAL FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. NEVER LET ME GROW ACCUSTOMED OR ACCLIMATED TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. Now off to well-earned rest!

Day two began with worship. The version of the Lord's Prayer we used was from the New Zealand Prayer Book. It begins "Eternal Spirit, Earth-Maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven:" We first visited the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where Dr King was assassinated. Much more information than we could absorb in the 2 1/2 hours we had. One bit that runs thru my mind is a quote from Mamie Till-Mobley, Emmitt Till's mother, talking about how she tried to prepare him for his ultimately fatal trip to visit to Mississippi. "How can you teach a child about hatred when all he has known is love?"

Day three was spent in Birmingham, AL. Even 60 years later, we are still shocked by the pictures of the bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church on Youth Sunday, the four young girls who were killed, the two Black teenaged boys who were killed separately in racially motivated shootings that day and the use of water cannons and dogs to put down the subsequent Childrens' March. The evil embodied in these actions is however surmounted by the hope we can derive from the fact that the 16th St. Baptist Church is alive and thriving, with a multi-race community of worshipers. Evil did not ultimately triumph. The courageous actions of many who stood up in opposition to racism and oppression, even at the risk of their own lives, did help promote needed societal change. I have to ask myself, to what courageous acts is the Holy Spirit calling me in this day and age?

On day four, we honored the foot soldiers of the Civil Rights movement. We started off at the Voting Rights Institute in Selma, learning about the thousands of unsung men, women and children who marched for justice, staged sit-ins at lunch counters, rode the freedom buses to galvanize public opinion in favor of basic human rights for Blacks in America. A highlight of the day was walking as a group across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. We were accompanied by a woman who had marched as a 15-year old on Bloody Sunday, was beaten and tear-gassed. We all owe a tremendous debt to these brave individuals who put their well-being and sometimes their very lives on the line to stand up for racial justice.