

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**The tragedy in Texas and Louisiana this past week has lifted the veil from our minds to reveal to us that we live in a nation of heroes. We saw not just our soldiers, sailors, marines, coastguardsmen, and first responders; but ordinary people, neighbors, strangers sacrifice their own security, even to the point of endangering their own lives, for the sake of others. People helped people. It didn't matter whether they were young or old; white or black or brown; republican or democrat; rich or poor; documented or undocumented; catholic, protestant, jew, muslim, or even atheist—everyone found themselves in the same boat and they pulled together—reaching out to the one who may have been in greater danger or a worse condition in which he or she found himself or herself.**

**In these cynical times when we have been tempted to believe the worst in others or thought that we lived in a world where everyone is out for himself or herself or saw our society as a self-serving, consuming, disjointed, and fractious conglomerate of individuals, this tragedy has given us this graced moment of seeing the better angels within us.**

**In Texas and Louisiana we saw neighbors who had never gotten around to meeting each other, cling to one another for mutual support; we saw others go to shelters and invite total strangers, their children, and their pets into their homes; and we saw the strong and brave carry the frail and the elderly on their backs to safety.**

**Today is a good day to ask how is it when all are poor and have nothing; when all hope seems gone and all that's left are life and limb that we find ourselves ready and willing to sacrifice even that for the sake of another—even a perfect stranger?**

**Could it be that this Gospel of Christ, in this tragedy, takes on real meaning: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct”?**

**We have to recognize that Jesus said this in response to Simon Peter's outrage at the thought that Jesus would have to suffer horribly and be killed. To Peter whom he had just proclaimed as blessed and told that he would be the rock upon whom he would build his Church, Jesus now speaks the harshest words we hear from him in the entire Scripture, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.”**

**Wow! What happened? It seems that when Peter said, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you,” Jesus snapped. I suspect it took him back into the desert where Satan tempted him to change his style of ministry—to become a kind of reality show star—**

**turn bread into stones; leap off the pinnacle of the temple; or just bow down and worship Satan himself.**

**In the desert he was able to walk away from Satan and his temptations, but, now, here was one of his best friends, the one the Father had chosen to lead his church, tempting him to turn away from the work he was sent to do—to save the world by his suffering, dying, and rising. It is in this context that Jesus says, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.**

**The Lord is making it as plain as He can. It’s not going to be easy to be his follower. His call to discipleship is not a call to an easy, comfortable lifestyle. Someone once wrote a book a few years ago called THE COMFORTABLE PEW. I’m afraid that’s the pew too many of us are willing to sit on in the Church—THE COMFORTABLE PEW. Of course, that’s true of our entire society. We seek the safe, secure, comfortable place in the world for ourselves and our families. The uncomfortable truth in today’s Gospel is that in the Church of Jesus Christ, there is no COMFORTABLE PEW.**

**The devastating, once-in-a-thousand-year storm wreaked havoc on the safe, secure, comfortable lives of millions of people in Texas and Louisiana this past week. All of a sudden they found themselves thoroughly detached from those things they thought were important. With just the clothes on their backs and sometimes not even shoes on their feet, in total abject poverty, they began to think “as God does, not as human beings do”—they sought, often at risk to their own lives, to save others.**

**My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that is not just heroic, that is TRUE Christian discipleship. It is what we are all called to in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. To truly be a disciple of Christ is to radically detach ourselves from the things that the world says are important and to pour ourselves out in loving service to others. To do otherwise is to simply sit on THE COMFORTABLE PEW.**

**Is it really necessary for some disaster to befall us to move us out of THE COMFORTABLE PEW to allow the hero in each of us, the TRUE disciple of Jesus Christ to step up, give of ourselves, get involved in making of this old world a new world—the Kingdom of God that has been entrusted to us to build?**

**Might this be the moment that the veil is lifted from your mind to reveal the hero in you to walk the few doors to meet that neighbor you never took time for--or greet the people on your job that you have simply walked passed day after day because they weren’t all that important to you--or try to make friends with the new kid in the class that everyone else is either avoiding or making fun of--or even taking a walk through the grounds of the VA Hospital in Coatesville just to greet those fallen soldiers and thank them for their service to our country--or maybe visiting a local nursing home and ask to visit a resident who has no family.**

**I truly believe that the heroism displayed by our sisters and brothers in Texas and Louisiana is within each and every one of us. To realize it we have to detach ourselves from the things, the stuff, the toys, and, yes, the prejudices and attitudes that the world (or Satan, if you will) has tried to convince us we cannot live without.**

**By practicing such detachment you will find yourself free to devote more of your resources—your time, your talents, and your treasure—to the work of discipleship—and become not just the hero that you were meant to be, but to become, maybe for the first time in your life, truly free, fully alive, filled with the joy of serving others.**