

Homily: 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time, yr. A, 2023

This story appeared on 60 minutes in May of this year. James Natchwey is one of the most respected photojournalists of our time. Over the last four decades, Natchwey has covered nearly every armed conflict in the world. He's risked his life to photograph the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement; his body is scarred from shrapnel and gunshot wounds sustained in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Bosnia and Rwanda. Now 75, Natchwey recently packed up his cameras and Kevlar vest, and traveled to Ukraine where he photographed both the brutality of the war and the inspiring courage of the Ukrainian people. Natchwey's photographs hauntingly capture moments of hate and heroism, senseless destruction, and quiet acts of compassion. His photographs reveal the deepest and most disturbing depths of who we are and what we do to each other. His images are sometimes difficult to look at - but important, not, to ever forget; they've appeared in Newspapers and magazines around the world, including the New York Times and Time Magazine. Natchwey sees his work as fighting for peace or fighting against an injustice...by informing people about it, with the faith that people will want, something done about it. He goes on; Many of the people I photograph are marginalized by the powers that be; they're silenced, they're made invisible. So when someone comes from another part of the world, and he assumes

risk to tell their story, I think people see us as a kind of messenger. James Natchwey has paid a heavy price for his work; he fights depression at times and gets angry at the oppression and suffering all around him -yet, he also sees reason for hope. I don't know if optimism is exactly the right word, but in these horrible situations, we see everyday citizens doing remarkable things for each other.

Mothers and fathers are my heroes; what they do for their children, how they protect them. Being in places where people have next to nothing; and yet, anything they have, they offer to a stranger. Those are the things that we all have and that are displayed in the worst situations that makes me believe in humanity. For James Natchwey, his camera is his "Cross." The impact his pictures have had on readers and viewers is his "prophet's reward....." We tend to see our "Crosses" as burdens or difficulties GOD gives us to fight through and conquer; but some spiritual writers suggest, that more often than we realize, our "Crosses" can be the abilities, skills, and talents we possess, that we can employ either for our own profit and satisfaction; or; for something greater, something transformative, something prophetic. Didn't JESUS do this? HE was and is, both Divine and Human; and humanly speaking, Didn't HE share HIS Own experience of the FATHER with HIS Disciples? As you've probably heard me say before, calling GOD FATHER, although it wasn't entirely unheard of in the Jewish Community,

was still rare - until JESUS came along. That it was significant for HIS Disciples is seen in the fact that although ABBA is an intimate Hebrew word for one's Father, it was preserved through-out the New Testament; that was, for the most part, written in Greek. In other words, the Evangelists writing in Greek, didn't translate ABBA into the Greek equivalent; but kept it in their manuscripts as they wrote their Gospels. A sign for most scholars that it most likely came from JESUS HIMSELF and was quite significant for the Early Church. In fact, JESUS, all along, shared HIS human experience of the FATHER with HIS Disciples and that's precisely what got HIM into trouble. ABBA is more concerned with what's in the heart; rather than a strict observance of the Law. ABBA isn't impressed with power, prestige or possessions; HE's more concerned with service. HE isn't as concerned with Religious Ritual as HE is with forgiving one's enemies, and taking care of the sick or injured. In a very real sense then, you could say, because JESUS'S experience was a threat to many in the political and religious leadership of the time, HE was deemed too dangerous and had to go. JESUS, very well, could've saved HIMSELF. JESUS could've kept it all safe most of all for HIMSELF. But JESUS chose to employ HIS experience of the FATHER for something greater, something transformative, something prophetic. That's what HE calls us to do, when HE calls us to put HIM above all our other relationships

and to accept any, and all, suffering that may come to us as we Proclaim the Truth through how we live our lives. What do we see through-out Scripture? GOD raising up prophets in every age; women and men of wisdom who imagine a better, holier, more just and peaceful world and who commit themselves to realizing that vision. Like the Prophets of Scripture, you and I are also called to be driven by the justice GOD calls us too and not to be dissuaded by the values of a dog eat dog world or the negative impact on personal ambition or reputation. Prophetic faith begins by letting go of our own agenda to a great extent, for the sake of realizing GOD'S Kingdom here and now, devoting every opportunity, resource, and talent we have, to making the Love of GOD a reality in every life we touch. Prophets are called to see beyond any current suffering to a future of wholeness and hope. According to JESUS it's as simple as offering a cup of cold water to a little one. A small deed to be sure; but a reminder of the sacrifices JESUS warns HIS Disciples they will make and the suffering they will endure for their faith. Contrary to what some may think; JESUS isn't attacking family life; but HE is warning HIS Disciples of the conflict and misunderstanding they will experience in proclaiming the Gospel. The Wisdom of JESUS is NOT the wisdom of this world. Following JESUS means, for instance, that we take a very different approach to resolving conflict, an approach totally at odds with the win at all costs

philosophy of the world. We are called to work at forgiveness and for reconciliation regardless of the cost. Christ's call is to see not enemies, but brothers and sisters. Again, GOD calls all the Baptized to the work of the Prophet. All the Baptized are called to proclaim GOD'S Presence in our world. In the words of the Spiritual writer, Jay Comier; JESUS demands that anyone who would be HIS Disciple to put themselves to ruin and nought for the sake of something much greater -GOD'S Reign of Compassion and Justice for all. Some will be called to be witnesses of HIS Justice in the midst of profound evil and hatred; others will be called to be witnesses of HIS Hope and Grace to those in pain and anguish. The Disciple then, embraces the Cross and what it stands for: GOD'S unconditional forgiveness, the total emptying of our selves of our wants and needs for the sake of others, and to forego even things like safety and comfort to live out all that is Right and Just. May we always imitate JESUS with faithfulness and integrity even when it means suffering and paying the price; may we always live; regardless of the cost and pain; HIS Way to Truth and Life. What is the bottom line of what JESUS is proclaiming? Cooperating with the life-giving grace of Baptism empowers us to pick up our Cross and rise to things we never thought possible. The old self has died, may we live for the Call to serve.