

Extraordinary Times

BY NIKI T. INGRAM

This is my first column as the editor of this magazine, and I had planned to introduce myself and tell you how I came to be here. Perhaps I will do that at another time because at this moment there is something more important to convey.

In the church of my faith it is “Ordinary Time.” In its simplest terms, Ordinary Time is the time between feasts when one lives out his or her faith. The older I get the more I love Ordinary Time. It suggests to me the sweetness of everyday life and is a time when one can meld into the rhythms of the world. I love the simplicity of this time and appreciate the quietness that comes with it. Unfortunately, we are not living in Ordinary Time. We are living in extraordinary times when chaos and fear are begetting bigotry, hatred and turmoil.

History tells us that we have been here before. Several years ago, I was in Durham, England and went to a typical Saturday British town fair. There was a merry-go-round, face painting and clothing and food vendors. There was also one vendor selling Nazi memorabilia. I was stunned by that, but the fact that he was selling it suggested that there was a market. He had old woolen uniforms with that familiar insignia and boxes of medals and cufflinks adorned with Swastikas. The evilness of the collection jumped through the glass.

On another trip to Europe I visited Dachau. It was one of those rare places where everyone was silent as they grasped the enormity of what had happened there. I was left with the questions of how this camp could have existed in this town and the townspeople not know about it, and if they did know about it why didn't anyone do anything?

Several weeks ago, I went to the Smithsonian's National

Museum of African-American History & Culture in Washington, D.C. The exhibit starts underground in Africa and, theoretically, you walk toward the light as you emerge from slavery and go through the Civil War, Jim Crow and into the present day. Each of these stages has its own horrors. You see the shackles of slavery, the whips that were used to beat men and women who were enslaved, nooses that were used during Jim Crow and

you come to a memorial for Emmitt Till, which is a replica of his funeral and includes his actual casket.* This is the only place in the museum where pictures cannot be taken, and there is the same quiet there that one experiences at Dachau. Ku Klux Klan robes are displayed in the Jim Crow section and, much like the Nazi memorabilia, they evoke a visceral reaction and the fear that they engendered is palpable. While those robes are supposed to represent the past, they reflect a present danger.

Again, we are living in times that are not ordinary. These are times when people who are avowedly racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic are emboldened to admit to these sentiments and act upon them. We are living in times when some are refusing to denounce this behavior and call it what it is. We must stand against this behavior.

There is an undercurrent now in the world that did not exist months ago. My sister now drives with her cell phone mounted on the dashboard so that she can press video in the

event she is stopped and something untoward happens. A Jewish friend tells me how she talks with other Jewish people about which of their Gentile friends would hide them should that become necessary. Married members of the LGBTQ community talk about their fears that their marriages will be nullified and the impact that will have on them and their children. And now,





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young people who were brought to this country as children by their parents and who are contributing members of our society don't know whether they will be deported to unknown places in a matter of months. These are not ordinary times.

What is so troubling is that there is a pervasive willingness to categorize people as others. When you do that it is much easier to dehumanize a person or a group of people. We must remember that it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles and that we must make a conscious effort to not defile others. What does that mean in ordinary terms? It means that when someone makes homophobic comments, you call them out; when someone makes derogatory comments about another race, you say that it is wrong; when

someone disparages women, you say that it is wrong and when someone says something that is anti-Semitic you tell them that it is wrong. You tell people that these comments cannot be made in your presence. This behavior cannot continue on our collective watch. Let us not be the people, when years from now, our descendants ask how and why did they let this happen. ■

**Emmitt Till's body was exhumed and reinterred in 2005. His family turned over his original casket to the Smithsonian.*

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