



"Show me the path of life"

31.10.2014 | Jean Duhaime

The Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal has held its 35th annual Christian Commemoration of the Shoah on Sunday, April 27, 2014, at Trinity Memorial Church. This event brought together Jews and Christians, on Holocaust Remembrance Day (known as Yom Hashoah in Hebrew), to commemorate the approximately six million Jews and one million others who died in the Holocaust during World War II.

The commemoration was be part of the regular Sunday Eucharist. The topic of this year, "Show me the path of life" (derived from Psalm 16:11), was developed in the homely by Rev'd Joyce Sanchez, a testimony by Holocaust survivor Paul Herczeg, a poem by Corine Lambert and a candle lighting ceremony led by Rev'd Sanchez and Rabbi Lisa Grushcow. A few musical pieces were performed in Hebrew by Cantor Rona Nadler, along with other songs by the Trinity Memorial Church choir directed by Christopher Grocholski. Here are the main texts of this Commemoration.

1. Show me the path of life

Homely on Leviticus 19:1-3, 9-18, 32-34; Psalm 16:8-11; 1Peter 1:3-9; and the Gospel of St. John 20:19-31.

By the Rev'd Canon Joyce Sanchez

Our theme for this morning is "Show me the path of life" (Ps. 16:11). Scripture allows us a glimpse into the lives of God's people in different times and places. It provides us with a window into God's world and his love for his people.

In our passage from [Leviticus](#), the Lord directs Moses to share his commandments with the Israelites. God has graciously provided his people with a way of life. Should they choose to follow it, a way of life grounded in justice, mercy, integrity, love, and respect, a way of life that would bring them into right relationship with the Lord and each other, a way of life through which they would learn how to live in peace, in God's shalom, a way of life through which they would find the Path of Life!

The Israelites have escaped from Egypt seeking a better life in the Promised Land. But this is no overnight trip: it is a journey that will involve many years of struggle. Still the Lord remains faithful to his people, leading them, offering them a way of life.

Today's reading from [St. John's Gospel](#) takes place many centuries later, in the days following the arrest and death of Jesus. It is a confusing time for his disciples and they are fearful. They are hiding out unsure of what they should do next. Some of the women from their community have claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus. The disciples just don't know what to think. In the midst of the chaos Jesus appears to his bewildered followers wishing them peace and, to be honest, some of them don't quite know what to believe. Empowered by the Holy spirit the disciples are sent out to continue the ministry of Jesus, a ministry of love, mercy, justice, and forgiveness.

The reading from the [First letter of Peter](#) comes from a generation after the death of Jesus. Christianity is a new religion and facing persecution under weight of the Roman Empire. The letter

is meant to encourage the faithful in difficult times. The author wants his readers to keep the faith in the face of adversity. They will be strengthened by enduring suffering if they remain steadfast in faith.

As we listen to these words today, may the Lord show us to the path of life, a life grounded in love, mutual respect, justice, and integrity, a life grounded in faith. It is my prayer that we, Jews and Christians alike, can walk that path together.

2. My path of life

The account of a Shoah survivor

By Paul Herczeg

My name is Paul Herczeg. I have been living in Montreal since 1947. I am a graduate of both Auschwitz and Dachau and lost both my parents in the process. I was extremely lucky and managed to survive.

I am a fifth generation Hungarian from a working class suburb of Budapest, very much like Verdun is to Montreal. This week - coincidentally the same week as this commemoration - is very significant for me, and very emotional as well. Seventy years ago, on April 28, 1944, just a year before the end of World War Two, the deportation of Hungarian Jews began and the first transport to Auschwitz left Hungary.

In the last week of April 1944, in Budapest, where I lived, Jewish people were ordered to leave their home on foot and report to a designated part of the city, carrying only a backpack or suitcase. This was the creation of the Ujpest Ghetto (Ujpest is a suburb of Budapest). Two or three families were forced to share an apartment.

For the sake of historical accuracy, it must be mentioned that all Jewish males between the ages of 18 to 50 were conscripted into the Hungarian Army. They did not receive uniforms, but rather, served in their own civilian clothing. They were sent to the Russian Front to dig foxholes and build roads, and were used mostly as human mine detectors, to clear minefields. These forced-labour battalions were enforced since 1941.

Due to this conscription, the deportees were mostly women and children of all ages, and young and old men. There were no men between 18 and 50. According to published statistics, within 8 weeks 437.000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz. There were 145 transports - two per day - each one averaging 3000 souls. Approximately 8% survived. I am one of them.

To survive was a gift. However with this gift come obligations. First and foremost, to ensure continuity: our family, traditions, ethics, and so on. Secondly, that those difficult times should not be forgotten, historically speaking. Or worse, denied. I owe this to the memory of my parents, my many relatives, comrades and friends who were not as fortunate as I was and perished.

My mission has been to be a witness - so that this will not be forgotten - and a messenger, so that genocide will never happen again. A famous philosopher (Santayana) said that those who do not remember history, will be condemned to repeat it. Unfortunately, the world has not learned the lesson of the Holocaust. Think of the genocide in Rwanda and now Sudan. While these may be on a smaller scale, they are no less horrific.

I have, I think, fulfilled my obligations by raising a family and also, by talking about these issues here and at many schools over the last 20 years. However, I consider my greatest achievement

that I was able to live a normal life, free of hatred/rancor despite all I have seen and experienced. I can still smile, enjoy life and perhaps contribute to society in general, and work towards understanding between people of all races, creeds and religions.

This was and continues to be, my "path of life".

3. We survived

Poem composed for the 2014 Christian Commemoration of the Shoah

By Corinne Lambert, a youth member of La Nativité parish

It was only a matter of time until they would come.

We were literally waiting in line to lose our lives.

Not because we had sinned, but because we believed.

And there was nothing they could do to change us.

I had always dreamt of a day when we would be free,

But their minds were decided and weren't going to change.

Such anger against us,

Wanting us exterminated from the world.

But here I stand before you.

I have survived many years of agony and live today as an example of strength.

I dreamed of the day that I would be able to see the path of light.

When I could walk down the street and not look over my shoulder.

Captured and forced to build our own prison.

Starved, beaten, cold and tired.

We suffered for years and later we were taken.

But we stayed strong;

We survived.

4. Candle lighting ceremony

Led by Rev'd Joyce Sanchez and Rabbi Lisa Grushcow, assisted by Cantor Rona Nadler

Rev'd Sanchez. Over the next few minutes, according to the rite of the Jewish community, we will light seven candles in memory of six million Jews and of millions of others who perished in the Holocaust. We will also remember all victims of other tragedies, hatreds and exclusions, yesterday and today.

Rabbi Grushcow. We pause for a moment of silence to remember those who were taken to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Treblinka and elsewhere during the Holocaust.

All. We remember the six million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust.

(Silence)

(First candle lit by Paul Herczeg.)

Rabbi Grushcow. They lived with faith. Not all, but many. And surely, many died with faith in God, in life, in the goodness that even flames cannot destroy. Even there, even there, these people sang: "**Ani ma'amin** ... I am believing with complete belief in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may tarry, I will wait every day for him to come."

Cantor Rona Nadler. I am believing – Ani ma'amin

I am believing
With complete faith
In the coming of the Messiah, I am believing
In the coming of the Messiah, believing
In the coming of the Messiah, I am believing
In the coming of the Messiah, believing

*Ani ma'amin,
Be'emuna chelema
Beviat hamachiach ani ma'amin
Beviat hamachiach, ma'amin
Beviat hamachiach ani ma'amin
Beviat hamachiach, ma'amin*

Rev'd Sanchez. We also remember our Jewish brothers and sisters who still bear the scars of that horrific event, and whose lives bear witness to the darkness of evil.

All. We remember those who survived and found a path of life.

(Second candle lit by Marsha Levy, member of CJDM)

Rabbi Grushcow. We remember all the other victims of the Holocaust, those people, including many Christians, among whom were priests and members of religious orders. Their faith compelled them to oppose Nazism.

Rev'd Sanchez. We also remember those who were killed because they were different: people who were disabled; members of the Roma community; people who were gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

All. We remember those who were murdered for who they were, who they loved, or what they believed.

(Third candle lit by Mayor Denis Coderre)

Rabbi Grushcow. We remember people persecuted because of their origin, culture or religion, and those who are displaced or exiled by war and ethnic conflicts.

Rev'd Sanchez. We pray especially for refugees and for those who support them.

All. We remember those caught in conflicts not of their own making.

(Fourth candle lit by Rev'd Stephen Petrie, Ecumenical Officier of the Anglican Church and member of CJCM)

Rabbi Grushcow. We remember the Righteous Gentiles and all those who risked their lives to save others during the Holocaust.

Rev'd Sanchez. We honour all believers, Christians, Jews and others who, in the name of their faith, work today for understanding and reconciliation between religions and for solidarity between people.

All. We remember those who in darkness, were brave enough to bring light.

(Fifth candle lit by Daphne Daniel, member of Trinity Memorial Church)

Rabbi Grushcow. We remember men and women of goodwill who are fighting for justice and genuine peace.

Rev'd Sanchez. We remember those who devote their life to the liberation of the oppressed and to the recognition of human rights for all.

All. We remember those who are working to build a better world.

(Sixth candle lit by Cantor Rona Nadler)

Rev'd Sanchez. We carry in our hearts and our prayers all children, including one and a half million Jews, who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Rabbi Grushcow. We also remember all children whose lives are still taken in the conflicts that divide people against one another.

All. We remember the children murdered in the Holocaust and all others whose dreams have been lost in conflicts forever.

(Seventh candle lit by Corinne Lambert, on behalf of the youth from La Nativité)

Rev'd Sanchez. May we be guided by God as we seek a path of life, justice, and peace for all humankind. Eternal, welcome the prayer of our hearts. Help us to remember, and to keep such horror from happening again.

Rabbi Grushcow. Grant us to find the words and gestures to comfort those who suffer. Shows us the way to come closer to one another in respect and love. Lead us in justice to peace, to shalom.

All. We remember so that we may act and walk together on the path of life. Amen.

A meaningful tradition

The Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal organized its first Christian commemoration of the Shoah in 1980 with a goal to invite a different Christian church each year to engage with members of Montreal's Jewish communities in a shared act of remembrance on the Sunday closest to Yom Hashoah, known in English as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Along the years, participants in the Christian Commemoration of the Shoah have included numerous French and English-speaking churches, including Roman Catholic, United Church, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Ukrainian Catholic, Anglican, Unitarian churches, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, among many others.