

Never-ending Violence

April has been a violent month in history.

April 7 is the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Rwandan Genocide, the mass slaughter of Tutsi and moderate Hutu tribes by members of the Hutu majority. During the approximate 100-day period from early April to mid-July, 1994, an estimated 500,000 to 1 million Rwandans were killed, constituting as much as 20% of the country's total population and 70% of the Tutsi then living in Rwanda.



April 15-16 is Holocaust Remembrance Day. Although it is not a public holiday, Yom HaShoah is observed by many on April 15-16 as a memorial to about 6 million Jewish people who were slaughtered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945.

On a bit smaller scale, April 16 is the anniversary of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2008. April 19 is the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. April 20 is the anniversary of the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999. April 26 is the anniversary of the assassination of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi, Guatemalan human rights defender, in 1998. April 29 is the World Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare. Also, on that date in 1992, race riots erupted in Los Angeles after a jury acquitted four white police officers for the beating of African American Rodney King.

As the violence seems to grow and spread, both abroad and in our own cities and neighborhoods, our challenge is to recall another historical April event, a letter written on April 16, 1963, by Martin Luther King Jr. from a Birmingham jail where he was being held for leading nonviolent marches protesting racial discrimination.

In that letter, sent to a group of clergymen who agreed that social injustice existed but argued that the battle against racial segregation should be fought solely in the courts, not on the streets, King wrote that white moderates, including clergymen, posed a challenge comparable to that of white supremacists in the sense that “shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” He warned that we cannot follow “the ‘do-nothingness’ of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalists.”

In a sermon he delivered in 1957, he stressed that “hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the world. The strong person is the one who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil....Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love.”

Is that another way to say that Love cannot wait?