

REFLECTION BY MR. MURRAY O'COIN

“The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.” Psalm 51:17

When I heard the news out of the Residential School in Kamloops of over 200 dead children being found, my spirit broke. My spirit broke as it had years ago when bodies were found in Manitoba. It broke like it did as I heard the stories of survivors and their families in my youth. My spirit broke like it did when I visited the Residential School, the members of my tribe and community attended in Brantford. And as I write this, I am still broken but I am hopeful.

The story of the Residential School System is part of a tragic narrative that still plays a part in First Nations Communities and in general, Canada. A tragic story that my church—the Catholic Church—played a part in. As a Catholic, all I can say to the ones that were lost, to the survivors and their families, and to the communities that have suffered, I am sorry. As just an average run of the mill nobody Catholic, I am so sorry.

I encourage all of us who have found meaning in the Catholic Church to be honest in engaging with this part of our church history. To be empathetic to those who were affected by the 44 schools ran in various dioceses by Catholic mission organizations. I would encourage this because in a few weeks the news cycle will move on to something else, and the attention of social media will have drifted. The rest of the world will move on but for people in my world, the Indigenous world, this remains our reality. I encourage us as Catholics to engage because as broken as I feel, I have so much hope.

I have hope because brokenness is a powerful offering, something that Christ can do miracles with. When Jesus sought to redeem the world, he did not do it as an earthly king sitting on a throne. He did not win us from sin as a warrior of legend with shining armor and a sharp sword. When God made flesh reached out in love to free us from slavery, He did so by allowing himself to be broken. He stretched out his arms in love allowing nails to pierce his hands and feet. In the Mass, we have a reminder of his gift of brokenness, “...this is my body broken for you...”

It is because my Saviour was broken that my brokenness can be hopeful. It is because Christ welcomed his own brokenness that the brokenness of the communities and families of the lost children of Residential Schools can be met with hope. Not the vain hope found in a fickle news cycle or erratic gossip mill. Not a hope that seeks to overshadow or downplay, but a real and present hope that stretches out pierced hands in an understanding love.

First Nations Communities have been working for generations to bring the story of Residential Schools to light. Survivors have been sharing their stories that in hearing we might understand, and in understanding, it might inspire action. I do encourage you to act. To remember the children who attended the schools in your prayers, to remember those who never made it home as you attend Mass and be ever hopeful of what miracles our Lord can work with a sacrifice of brokenness.

Lord break us, for those who have been broken.

Murray O'Coin

St. Michael the Archangel Parish

st.mikesmurray@gmail.com