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Call to Worship: 36th Annual Interfaith Holocaust Remembrance Service

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36th Annual Interfaith Holocaust Remembrance Service
Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey
Sunday, April 14, 2013

CALL TO WORSHIP

Rev. Msgr. C. Anthony Ziccardi, S.T.D., S.S.L.

I am Father Anthony Ziccardi, Seton Hall's Vice President for Mission and Ministry. In my own name and the name of our University President, Dr. Gabriel Esteban, I welcome you to the 36th Annual Holocaust Remembrance Service of the South Orange-Maplewood Interfaith Clergy Association.

Seton Hall is happy to host this service during its own year-long celebration of Building Bridges. Exactly 60 years ago, John M. Oesterreicher, a Jewish convert to Christianity and also a Catholic priest, arrived at Seton Hall. He had fled Europe where he had denounced the Nazis and their racist ideology and practices and came to the United States to continue his work, which was to help Jews and Christians to come together in mutual understanding and appreciation. Here he founded the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies to organize academic research, publication, and teaching. The Institute eventually spun off a Master's degree program, which flourished and continues to do so under colleagues of both faiths whom Msgr. Oesterreicher himself recruited or who have come after him. At the Second Vatican Council, he became the main architect of the fourth chapter of *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, so that through Msgr. Oesterreicher Seton Hall has had worldwide impact.

The story of humankind is one filled with immense suffering caused by the sins of hateful men and women against their fellows, but halted short of complete calamity by the love of other men and women, who are the proof of God's existence, God's benevolence, and the fundamental goodness of God's human creation. The people of Israel are the supreme sign of this.

As Luna Kaufman, a Holocaust survivor close to Seton Hall, has often observed, Hitler could have succeeded, but he was defeated. And centuries earlier, the princes and generals of Babylon could have prevailed, but they failed. And

centuries yet further removed, the Pharaoh of Egypt could have triumphed, but he was trounced. By whatever means each of these oppressors was stopped, God did it, behind the scenes, in order to preserve his chosen people and righteous humanity from sin, for the reason that the psalmist intuited: “The scepter of the wicked will not prevail... Lest the just themselves turn their hands to evil” (Psalm 125:3).

Because evil seemingly knows no vacation — no epoch is untouched by it — and hope can easily wane, we must remember and speak, that is, tell forth the history of human suffering, halted and overturned by God! God himself has commanded it, as for example in these instructions of Moses concerning what the people of Israel must do once they should enter the Promised Land and harvest the first-fruits:

You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “I declare this day to the LORD your God that I have come into the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.” Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. And you shall say before the LORD your God, “A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 26:3-9).

As we gather today to remember mournfully the massive destruction of human life that was the Shoah, we gather also to tell, to recount, to acknowledge with gratitude and praise the staying hand of God that rescued once again Israel from annihilation and indeed all of us from madness and evil.

Let us be summoned and led in this act of worship by the thanksgiving of Asaph and his brethren in the First Book of Chronicles (16:8-17, 23-24):

Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name; make known among the nations his deeds. Sing to him, sing his praise, proclaim all his wondrous deeds. Glory in his holy name; rejoice, O hearts that seek

the LORD! Look to the LORD in his strength; seek to serve him constantly. Recall the wondrous deeds that he has wrought, his portents, and the judgments he has uttered. You descendants of Israel, his servants, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones! He, the LORD, is our God; throughout the earth his judgments prevail. He remembers forever his covenant which he made binding for a thousand generations, which he entered into with Abraham and by his oath to Isaac; Which he established for Jacob by statute, for Israel as an everlasting covenant..... Sing to the LORD, all the earth, announce his salvation, day after day. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

C. ANTHONY ZICCARDI
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