

Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent, March 2, 2023

Recommended readings: pp. 67-68, "A Ghazalled Sentence..." and pp. 81-87, "Sugar" (part two)

In chapter three, Khalil Gibran Muhammad asks what happens when the number of slaves outnumbers free souls in the neighborhood? "After the official end of the international slave trade as of January 1, 1808, the domestic trade from the Upper South to the Lower South exploded, while traffic continued on the Atlantic. As a result, Louisiana's enslaved population soared, quadrupling over a twenty-year period to 125,000 souls in the mid-nineteenth century. New Orleans became the Walmart of people-selling. The number of enslaved labor crews on its sugar plantations doubled. And in every sugar parish, Black people outnumbered white."

Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude and made their lives bitter with hard servitude in mortar and bricks and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them. (Exodus 1:8-14)

White supremacy is driven by the fear of what will be lost when the "other" figures out they aren't in the minority. The fear is that those who have been oppressed will become the oppressor. It takes courageous work on everyone's part to end cycles of oppression. That is true of individuals, communities, and among nations. But it starts with the recognition of oppressive systems and the power of fear.

Prayer

God, you love all you have created and desire that we live in harmony and unity. Help us to see when we react out of fear rather than responding with mercy and compassion. Give us the courage to work towards unity among races, religions, nations, and neighborhoods. Make us your ambassadors of peace, justice, and unity. Amen.