

This speech was delivered by Teresa Daly ('11) at morning assembly on Tuesday, January 12, 2010. A Loyola Student is Committed to Doing Justice

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Although I wish I could claim the idea as my own, these words were spoken by Martin Luther King, Jr. to sum up his basic philosophy regarding justice. The notion of setting aside my own desires in order to advance someone else’s needs did not initially sound like it should be difficult. In a society with an attitude that promotes instant gratification, however, overcoming selfishness is not as simple as I had assumed it would be. Therefore, my commitment to justice is primarily drawn from my growing awareness of those “broader concerns of humanity,” as well as my personal challenge to try to advance the cause of anyone whose needs surpass my own.

When I was first required to complete service hours in order to receive Confirmation, the word “service” began as a synonym for “charity,” however, as time progressed, I saw service as being something much more cooperative and faith-based. The very definition of Christian service seems to imply that we are helping others, yet the people I have sought to assist seem to have done far more to help me, instead. One of the biggest eye-openers of my life was realizing the existence of Camden, New Jersey - not the fact that it is a city, but that it is a destitute one which had completely escaped my notice despite being so close to home. More powerful than the sight of boarded up buildings, however, was the spirituality I encountered in Camden residents. The church was packed for mass on Holy Thursday, and a huge crowd turned out for the three-hour-long procession on Good Friday. Seeing God in a place that appeared to be falling apart before my eyes was something I had never expected to happen, yet I felt an

incredible connection to everyone there with me. Every single person cared about contributing to a community effort in a place that would not seem likely to have a sense of community at all.

I had no idea what I was in for when I applied for the trip to the Ignatian Teach-In, but I soon realized how much I had to learn once I was there. I thought I was an expert on the past situation in El Salvador, yet the students from other Jesuit institutions across the country soon taught me otherwise. I had also believed that the main focus of the Teach-in was the School of the Americas. Once again, I was mistaken; one speaker discussed the reality of her homeland of Iraq, another defended her stance against nuclear weapons, and another talked about the experiences she had during a recent visit to El Salvador. While the Jesuits killed in November of 1989 were constantly recalled through both prayer and presentation, it was not until Gene Palumbo stepped up to the podium that I ever recognized the martyrs for their humanity. An American journalist based in El Salvador for over twenty-five years, Palumbo knew the Jesuits personally and offered stories of his own encounters with each of them. Given the legendary status that they have reached both in their own country and in the global community, it seemed almost impossible to me that each of them had once been an everyday person who was simply working to carry out God's mission of compassion to those around him.

I had a similar experience when visiting the home in which Martin Luther King, Jr. spent his childhood; standing outside of the bedroom that King had slept in as a child and seeing toys scattered across the floor helped me recognize that even the most larger-than-life figures were once far less intimidating. At that stage of his life, no one could have realized exactly how he would leave an incredible legacy that outlasted his humanity. Upon reading his speeches and delving further into King's mission, I was struck by his ability to relate his message of social equality to a world of people to whom that ideal meant nothing. The enormity of his task to

reverse the mindset of his critics and gain the support of a reluctant audience was certainly daunting, but he succeeded in changing the minds of millions. This was not easily achieved; when I paid close attention to his philosophy of nonviolence, I thought about how it actually translates to issues far beyond civil rights alone, but also to human rights collectively.

I have never suffered any significant loss or hardship that could possibly enable me to compare any of my experiences to those of the people I have met or learned about. For this blessing I am incredibly fortunate, yet with this good fortune I am also challenged with learning to empathize with disadvantaged people and to understand situations so vastly different from my own. Justice is not pursued through a series of repeated, isolated acts. It does not limit itself to a few hours spent at a soup kitchen or a nursing home and involves much more consideration than it is typically given. Justice is a process, and responding to the call to be of service to others is a response to God; it affirms an understanding that all people are intended to help one another whenever the opportunity arises. As defined by Susan Haarman, a Master of Divinity student at Santa Clara University, solidarity is “allowing oneself to be wholly converted and trying to live out just beliefs.” As a result, I constantly try to align my mentality with my actions in order to understand people and their circumstances rather than be frustrated with them. I cannot fully and immediately alter my ways of thinking, so the struggle is ongoing; however, I find myself becoming increasingly more aware of the people that used to escape my notice and trying to put myself in their position rather than brushing them aside. For me, these moments of clarity serve as a reminder that I need to make changes within myself if I want to make changes outside of myself and impact people on a far larger scale.