



# Mary Carol's Musings

Spiritual Reflections from Mary Carol Wall

## Priest, Prophet and King

I had the opportunity to hear a presentation by Bud Welch. He's a very good speaker... not so much dynamic as honest, speaking straight from the heart.

He shared some discussions he had with his daughter, Julie, about faith and about the death penalty. He believed that the death penalty was sometimes necessary. She was adamant it was absolutely wrong. She added, in one discussion, that if something ever happened to her, and the death penalty was under consideration, she wanted no part of it... she did not want anyone to be executed because of what they had done to her.

A short while later, on a beautiful morning in April, Timothy McVeigh set off the bomb in Oklahoma City. Julie, along with many others, lost her life. And her father absolutely knew that the death penalty was warranted. He began a journey to seek justice for her death, with a righteous vengeance. Nowadays, though, he is walking a journey, instead, of hope, of life, of light... and of forgiveness.

So, what does all this have to do with the Baptism of Christ? Remember how John was abashed that the Messiah should ask for baptism at his hand? Jesus responded it was needed, to fulfill all righteousness. It was a sign of how fully Jesus was willing to become human, to become frail, to become vulnerable... and to serve his Father no matter what He asked or where He led.

There are a number of roles that are given us, as they were assumed by Christ, through baptism... the roles of priest, prophet, and king... and of Suffering Servant. We are aware of Christ's role as priest, and of how the apostles later stepped into these roles. The ordained priesthood, within the Catholic Church, has been understood by Christ's commissioning of the apostles.

But there is also another priesthood, the priesthood of the faithful, to which each and every Christian is called by the authority of baptism. This is a priesthood that asks us to live lives of sacrificial love, and to keep connected with God by praying. These are prayers of thanksgiving, of petition for the people we know, for our church and other communities... for the world, just as Jesus prayed to God, our Father.



Julie Welch  
September 12, 1971-  
April 19, 1995

Bud Welch



What do you think of when you hear the word, 'prophet'? Most folks think of fortune-telling, of seeing the future. Prophecy is actually truth-telling, calling people to account for their actions... or lack, thereof. Prophets tend to not be popular, for theirs are words we do not wish to hear, words that demand changes in us and our culture.

And how about, 'king'? We think of kings as leaders... as all-powerful. Good kings are individuals who guide their people, lead with good laws, build up the kingdom, help them in times of trouble, protect them, and make sure their needs are met.

Priesthood is closely tied to the role of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah speaks of how the courageous suffering of the faithful is what brings salvation to the world. Jesus epitomizes this aspect of our faith by suffering, and even dying, so that all may be saved. Baptism joins us to Christ's body, to do his work, to speak his words, to live his love... and at times, in doing so, to be hurt, to suffer, so that life may be resurrected.

So, back to Bud and Julie Welch... and Tim McVeigh. For two years, Bud struggled... and anguished over the loss of his daughter. He eventually realized that he was losing his own life, in his anger and wish for vengeance. He knew that God, and Julie, would want him to be able to live his life, not waste it in anger and despair. He was being asked to forgive Tim McVeigh.

Does forgiving mean forgetting? No, it does not. Does it mean that you have to let 'normalcy' return to a relationship? No... some actions require consequences that mean you can't ever 'go back.' I read somewhere that forgiving means letting go of the other guy's throat. I like that image... if you are grappling, in anger, with another person, you have no hands available for loving, no breath for speaking words of healing or of hope. Your sole focus is your hurt and your anger. There is no room for life.

Forgiveness for Bud Welch meant reclaiming his life, and finding there was room, again, for love and hope and light. He started by praying... long, and hard, and deep. He prayed for his daughter. He prayed for himself, and all the other folks left behind by the deaths of those they loved. He worked hard at finding a way that he could pray for Timothy McVeigh. One day he saw Tim McVeigh's dad on television. It was a news report. Bud saw the enormous pain carried by this man, and realized that he, too, was deeply victimized. And so, he prayed for Mr. McVeigh. Meanwhile, he began choosing actions of loving sacrifice. Talks were given to challenge the death penalty, in general, and Tim McVeigh's death penalty in specific. Visits were made to death row inmates to meet men and women who had received the ultimate sentence, to hear their stories, to speak to them of all he carried in his heart. One day he met Tim McVeigh's dad. That meeting helped both Bud Welch and Mr. McVeigh to move forward in healing.

Thus was Bud Welch learning to live out the priesthood of the faithful. His work

to fight the death penalty, to call people to forgiveness and purpose in life, is the work of a prophet. His leadership in vision, his concern with the healing of broken spirits and lives, his attention to the needs of others and the work to right some of life's wrongs is all work of a good king. We are not all-powerful kings. We cannot fix everything. We do not have the ultimate authority... but we are doing king's work... and in doing so, are helping to make God's kingdom more accessible to all (think about Kings Peter and Edward, and Queens Susan and Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*). Lastly, there is the reality of being the Suffering Servant... servant of God, and of God's people. No one can doubt that Bud Welch has suffered, and suffered deeply. He made the life-affirming choice to turn the agony of that suffering somehow into loving action. He chose God's way. And in doing so, new life is rising out of the ashes. It is a resurrection.

Forgiveness gave Bud Welch a purpose in life. He travels and speaks extensively against the death penalty. If anyone deserves a voice in that discussion, surely it is the parent of a murder victim. There is a validity, a reality, in his words that those of us who speak, not based on experience, do not have. His suffering has given power to his words, to his voice, to his actions. He touches hearts and minds to which he had no access before. He knows that Julie lives, with God. But his life makes her also alive to us, and her spirit is part of God's spirit of healing and of hope.

He has made the decision to follow the call of Baptism, as Christ did... to go where the Father leads, to do what the Father asks... and by our baptism, we are called to do the same. Are we willing to follow that call?