

# Reflection and Prayer on Heroes

**Reader 1.** From the Book of Judith: "Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right . . . Who are you to put God to the test today, and to set yourselves up in the place of God in human affairs?" (8:11–12).

From the words of Sojourner Truth in 1851: "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?" (*Famous Black Quotations*, page 37).

When people who are abused cower quietly in corners, injustice lives on. Bent heads, muffled voices, and terrified spirits invite wrongs to continue.

Judith was a biblical heroine who refused to let her role be determined by others. As a woman and a widow, she had little social standing in ancient Israel. Yet she did not let this keep her from speaking out and challenging the community leaders to action.

Sojourner Truth was a modern hero who refused to keep quiet despite being mistreated and devalued. Her womanhood was slighted and her personhood was trampled, yet she traveled America to tell all who would listen about the evils of slavery. (Adapted from *The Catholic Youth Bible [CYB]*, near Judith 8:9–36)

**Let us pray.** *Dear God, give us the boldness of Judith and Sojourner Truth to address the wrongs of this world. Amen.*

**Reader 2.** From the Gospel of Mark: "They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus" (15:21).

According to this passage, the Roman soldiers compelled a North African black man from Cyrene by the name of Simon, a passerby, to carry the cross of Jesus. We do not know anything more about Simon of Cyrene, except that Mark identifies him as the father of Alexander and Rufus. The reference to Simon's sons by name and the possibility that Rufus is the same person that Paul greets in Romans 16:13 indicate they were known among the early Christians. For African

Americans this evidence of the prominence and influence of African people in the early Christian Church is significant.

African people were there from the beginning of Christianity. They were not latecomers to the Christian faith. Thank God, somebody always remembers! African Americans and other people who have experienced oppression are in danger of forgetting who they are and where they come from—not because they are forgetful peoples, but because the oppressors have tried to erase their culture and identity in order to cripple and control them. Despite this, somebody always remembers. (Adapted from *CYB*, near Mark 15:21)

**Let us pray.** *Dear God, we praise you for having African people there from the beginning of your plan of salvation. We praise you in knowing that people of all races will be with you at the end. Hallelujah! Amen.*

**Reader 3.** From Paul's letter to the Galatians: "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up" (6:9).

From the words of Frederick Douglass: "Be not discouraged. There is a future for you. . . . The resistance encountered now predicates hope. . . . Only as we rise . . . do we encounter opposition." (*Famous Black Quotations*, page 69)

These words by Frederick Douglass in 1892 encouraged African Americans not to abandon their struggle for equality. It seemed that the more African Americans struggled, the more they suffered pain inflicted on them by others. In the face of certain suffering, Douglass urged them to look toward the promise of living as equals under the law.

They knew that God was their liberator and justice giver. God made them brave in the face of danger and capable of dying for the cause they embraced. They looked to God and saw their future. They took the words from Paul's letter seriously. Today, we don't face slave masters nor do we live on plantations as servants in fetters, but we do endure other situations equally as perilous. Let us not grow weary or lose heart. We must have faith. Our God is still in the saving business. (Adapted from *CYB*, near Galatians 6:9)

**Let us pray.** *Dear God, our future is in your hands. Lead us to it with your power. Amen.*

**Reader 4.** From Paul's letter to the Hebrews: "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain" (6:19).

From a tribute to an African American mother:

Something mighty powerful kept a smile on my mother's face every day when I was a little girl. I never knew she was in pain. All I saw was a woman with a demeanor of hope and a purpose in life.

I did not know it back then, but she was enduring racial harassment on her job. There was unceasing verbal hate toward African Americans. As I have matured, I have learned that her harassment was not unique. It was a common experience for many African Americans in this country.

When faced with oppressive situations, let us be thankful for a God who continuously fills us with hope. Without hope, oppression is lethal. Hope keeps us moving forward when we'd just as soon give up. Hope makes us smile at tomorrow, even though today is a bitter pill. Is your hope anchored in the Lord? (Adapted from *CYB*, near Hebrews 6:19–20)

**Let us pray.** *Dear God, give us hope when we face oppression. Amen.*

**Reader 5.** From the Gospel of Matthew: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (16:25).

From the words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "A man who won't die for something is not fit to live" (*Famous Black Quotations*, page 15).

Jesus tells us we need to leave behind our old life of selfishness and embrace a new way of life marked by caring about the needs of others. Only then can the spirit of the Lord abound. Martin Luther King Jr. practiced this new way of life in his dream for a better day for African Americans—a dream he was willing to work and die for. (Adapted from *CYB*, near Matthew 16:25)

**Let us pray.** *Dear God, when we act to take care of only ourselves, give us the strength to live selflessly. Amen.*

(All scriptural citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1993 and 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the United States of America. All rights reserved. The portions labeled *CYB* are adapted from "The Principle of Kujichagulia," near Judith 8:9–36; "We Were There," near Mark 15:21; "The Principle of Imani," near Galatians 6:9; "Anchor of the Soul," near Hebrews 6:19–20; "The Principle of Ujamaa," near Matthew 16:25, respectively, in *The Catholic Youth Bible*, first edition [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000]. Copyright © 2000 by Saint Mary's Press. The words of Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr. are from *Famous Black Quotations*, edited by Janet Cheatham Bell [New York: Warner Books, 1998], pages 37, 69, and 15, respectively. Copyright © 1986, 1991, and 1995 by Janet Cheatham Bell.)