

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



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Shrine of the Immaculate Conception Church  
*Atlanta, Georgia*

Mass in Commemoration of Dr. King's Birthday

✠ Wilton D. Gregory  
*Archbishop of Atlanta*

Only a prophet from God could have visualized the complete and perfect peacefulness of all of the natural order as did the Prophet Isaiah. With a prophet's heart, he wrote of a time when all of creation would live in perfect harmony – when babies would play with cobras, and lambs could cuddle with wolves, when bears and cows would frolic together – all of nature would be at peace. 2800 years ago, Isaiah dared to believe that God's Kingdom would usher in for Israel not just a political truce, or a social accommodation, or cultural compromise but a real transformation of creation itself.

What would Isaiah visualize if he prophesied for our world today – Muslims would embrace Jews, Immigrants would be greeted at our borders as the unique treasure that they are for our nation, Gay people would be warmly caressed by Straight people, Klan members would kiss Black people, Liberal Catholics would openly defend and respect the feelings and opinions of Conservative Catholics, Republicans would sit down and dine willingly and regularly with Democrats! However, given the vitriol of our world – Isaiah's original vision may well seem much more attainable today!

But the Lord's prophet can always see things as they are intended to be and not just as they happen to be at the present moment. Dr. King was such a prophet as he summoned our entire nation to live out the lofty calling of our foundational documents and to become the people of justice and peace that we are meant to become. We need so many more prophets today – than perhaps even a generation ago when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. walked these very streets of Atlanta and preached about such a prophetic vision. Isaiah and Dr. King were both intrepid dreamers who summoned the people of Israel and America to envision what God intended us to be and not just what we must grapple with each day.

And what does God expect of us? God calls us to live in perfect peace not just with nature but even more importantly with one another. A true prophet always raises our horizons incredibly high. A true prophet dares to see all of creation in absolute harmony. A true prophet demands that people – all people

see each other with a vision that ultimately must come from God Himself. A true prophet never settles for a mediocre solution or a halfhearted vision. And perhaps that is why prophets are so often ridiculed and occasionally even martyred. But our world no less than the world of Isaiah desperately needs a prophet's vision and challenge.

This very city that has produced and nurtured Dr. King must now yield new prophets who can see according to God's vision and who have the courage to proclaim God's plan for peace and harmony. Fortunately, we have witnessed a few such prophets in the recent past. We heard with incredible gratification of the families of those who were murdered in Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina who freely expressed their forgiveness of Dylan Roof the delusional young White man whose hatred drove him to kill those people having first engaged them in prayer. We all must ask ourselves: *"how does someone learn to hate so intensely in only 22 years?"*

Yesterday, in the City of New York Steven McDonald was buried from Saint Patrick's Cathedral. He was the policeman who was shot and paralyzed by a fifteen-year-old and who forgave that African-American young man and brought such a degree of healing and mercy to a situation that he startled and inspired all who heard of his courage and example. Again we ask ourselves: *"how could someone learn to love so absolutely in only 29 years?"*

Black people forgiving White people and a White police officer forgiving a violent young Black man, those kinds of examples startle us because we too often begin to believe that babies and cobras don't mix, lambs and wolves must always be enemies, cows and bears will never live together in peace. Yet these examples remind us of the vision of Isaiah and the dream of Dr. King.

Lesser widely known actions of compassion and mercy are available to all of us when we volunteer and support the works of the Saint Francis Table here at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception or engage in the countless works of charity of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society or Catholic Charities or any of a dozen other social justice activities within this local Church. These ways that we witness God's design for justice and harmony for all people rarely seize the media headlines like those in Charleston or New York, but they too belong to God's plan to bring all of His creation into perfect harmony and peace and we all too often forget that those who serve and care for the poor, the immigrant, the neglected must be fulfilling Isaiah's vision and Dr. King's dream. And those people must more and more be us.