



13 A reflection on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2026

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As we take a moment to reflect on the significance of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, I realize that he has been a hero of mine since I was ten. It's hard to believe that I first learned about him as a fifth grader at Santa Isabel Elementary School, an inner-city Catholic school in the Los Angeles area run by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. And yet, the lessons he taught me remain in my heart to this day.

Like many of my classmates, I was surprised when my teacher, Sister Maynard Werner, spent the week teaching us about nonviolent demonstrations and protests, the subsequent police brutality, and eventually, the beginning of a generational transformation. It was unimaginable that someone like me, the son of Mexican immigrants, would've had a radically different life if I were born before or while Dr. King was leading the Civil Rights Movement. However, just because it's hard to imagine doesn't make it any less real. And I'm forever grateful to him for giving his life and leading a movement inspired by love and nonviolence to continue the hard work of dismantling racist structures that prevent inclusion.

It must be said. I am in awe of how much Dr. King accomplished with love and nonviolence, two Gospel values he learned from Jesus Christ, Gandhi, and others. This radical approach to change, which is in essence a rejection of the sword, transformed my worldview as a child and has become more relevant to me as the new father of a beautiful baby girl. I not only want the best life for my daughter but for all future generations. It must also be said. It often seems that our broken world is at odds with people who try to follow and embody the Gospel values taught by Jesus. As vocation ministers, we are called to be faithful to spreading the Good News and to model love in all our interactions, especially when we are challenged with difficult conversations.

As we learn to adapt and respond to a rapidly changing world, may we never forget the lessons that Dr. King taught us: "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

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