NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Civil rights, MLK and Vatican II

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In August 1963, I was ensconced in a novitiate in Titusville, Pa. Those were not the days (not quite yet) when nuns routinely joined public marches or demonstrations, no matter how worthy the cause. So unfortunately, I was not present for the "I have a dream" speech of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

But I heard about it after it was delivered, and I was profoundly moved. It seemed to me that King -- this Baptist minister from the deep South -- was doing for our nation what Pope John XXIII was doing for our church.

The Second Vatican Council was just getting underway in 1963. Pope John XXIII was opening the windows of our stuffy church and letting in the fresh air. Messages about justice and peace began to waft on the airwaves. We all had a dream for our church. It all fit together. I remember thinking, "These two men should meet each other; they have a lot in common."

On Saturday I plan to do what I could not do 50 years ago: attend that March on Washington. Sadly, we must march for some of the same causes King championed: expanding voting rights (for example, reversing the Supreme Court decision earlier this year), ending poverty and homelessness, and removing the continuing reality of racism from our society.

John XXIII would, if he were alive, join the march. And for this one, I think Pope Francis would feel at home as well.

Source URL (retrieved on *10/19/2014 - 23:43*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/civil-rights-mlk-and-vatican-ii