

## Addressing the Sin of Racism

*The following is offered as a way to assist Priests and Deacons to address the recent events in Charlottesville, Virginia in particular and the sin of racism in general. The below is prepared as a resource for preparation of homilies for Mass or prayer vigils. They seek to keep in mind the readings for the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Sundays of this year as much as possible. However, the universal message of Christ's call for us to be one (John 17:21) is the underlying theme, which allows the resources to be used at other times as well.*

### **The Problem**

- Recent events in Charlottesville have caused many to realize the extent to which the sin of racism inflicts our nation. We witnessed this past week a vile replay of history at its worst. White Supremacism, Anti-Semitism, Neo-Nazism, Fascism, and Racism are evil and have no place in our nation, neighborhood, or heart.
- Racism persists in many hidden ways. However, the events in Charlottesville exposed how crude and blatant racism is. We must call out the sin of racism.
- Racism is real. Its effects are in each of us, in our Church, and in our nation. Racism and its most extreme expression in White Supremacism are toxic diseases that underlie countless forms of division, violence and hatred.
- [20<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Jesus points to this sin by using the thoughts of the people, who saw the Canaanites as their bitter enemy. But faith in Christ brings healing and mercy to all.]
- [21<sup>st</sup> Sunday: The sin of racism can be seen as one of the “gates of the netherworld,” but the Church, founded on the rock, shall conquer the evils of this world.]
- Almost 40 years ago, the Bishops of the United States wrote a Pastoral Letter on Racism. Among the many things they discussed was the fact that “Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.”
- The fundamental problem is this: too often we are apt to group people as either “us” or “them.” And when we see another as “one of them,” we tend to act out of fear – a fear of the unfamiliar and a fear that they will somehow harm us. This is the root from which racism too easily springs.

### **The Answer**

- The answer is Christ, who proclaimed the oneness of the human family.
- The answer is Christ, whose Church is a “house of prayer for all peoples” (Is. 56:7).
- The answer is Christ, who came to heal the divisions of sin and death.
- The answer is Christ, who commands us to do what is right and just (Is. 56:1).
- The answer is Christ, who prayed to his heavenly Father, “so that all may be one...” (John 17:21).

- The answer is Christ's Kingdom where there are no divisions; where there is no separating us from them, and where there is no fear of harm from "them."

### **What are we called to do?**

- The answer is Christ, and Christ calls for our conversion. His first words in the Gospel are, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17).
- The recent events, and indeed the events unfolding over the last few years, days and hours all point to the need that we, as a nation, as a people, have for conversion.
- Conversion requires prayerful self-reflection. As a nation, we need to self-reflect on what aspects of our communal and civil structures actually divide and separate us. How are they covertly racist? As a Church, we need to self-reflect on how we have been unwelcoming to the stranger, the person of a different race, or the immigrant. We need to self-reflect on how we have not challenged the sin of racism enough. More so, we must listen to persons of a different race and listen to the immigrant. And when we think we have listened, we must listen again. We must hear the story and begin to share the journey more deeply. Let us come together in the love of Christ to better know one another as sisters and brothers.
- *And in order for our nation and our church to be healed of the sin of racism, each one of us needs to reflect and be healed.* We may not think of ourselves as racist, or being prejudiced, or intolerant but is that entirely the case? Intolerance and bias can hide in our attitudes and arrogances. Where are the places in our own heart that might harbor hostility, concealed discrimination and prejudice?
- Conversion requires courageous and ongoing self-reflection, it requires each of us to examine our conscience humbly before Christ.
- We must be contemplative enough to allow the Lord to work in the depth of our heart on these issues.
- So each of us needs to ask questions such as:
  - How have I been silent on the events of the past weeks?
  - How have I been silent on racism?
  - How have I participated in words or actions that denigrate others?
  - What am I not seeing in myself, ignoring about myself that is contrary to love of neighbor, even those I do not know?
  - What fears do I knowingly or unknowingly hold about people that are different from me?
  - How do I consciously or unconsciously act on those fears? In my choices, my beliefs, my actions, my attitudes?
  - How have I failed to do what is right and just?
  - Have I failed to ask Christ to heal me of all prejudice?

## General Intercessions

**Presider:** Having professed our faith, we now confess the need of our nation, the need in our neighborhoods, the need in our own hearts for mercy, forgiveness and healing.

- 1) We pray for our Church, that the Holy Spirit give us a fresh outpouring of His Gifts that we may stand up to protect our sisters and brothers threatened by the evil ideology of racism. We pray to the Lord...
- 2) We pray for our Government and its leaders, that they may have the strength and determination to reject all forms of racism, division and violence. We pray to the Lord...
- 3) We pray for all people of different races and of nationalities who know the pain of rejection, prejudice and discrimination. May they be delivered from hatred by our unrelenting embrace of solidarity and unity. We pray to the Lord...
- 4) We pray for those who harbor hate in their hearts, in their attitudes and in their actions. May the light of Christ cast out their aggression and fear. We pray to the Lord...
- 5) We pray that a spirit of nonviolence and calm may prevail in our cities and in our hearts. We pray to the Lord...
- 6) We pray for our children. May they be healed of the violence and terrible words they have heard these days. May the Word of life replace words of fear and intimidation. We pray to the Lord...
- 7) We pray for those injured in Charlottesville, may the healing hand of Christ renew their strength and deepen their peace. We pray to the Lord...
- 8) We pray for all those who have died throughout history at the hands of others driven by hatred and fear. We pray to the Lord...