

OPEN WIDE OUR HEARTS: ROOTING OUT RACISM

St. Pius X Prayer Service, June 30, 2020

WELCOME

Presider: Welcome everyone! We have come together virtually this evening to pray for guidance in how we might address racism in our parish, city, state, nation and world. We are grateful to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops for their recent pastoral letter against racism addressed to all the faithful. The document is entitled *Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love* and it provides the framework for our prayer together this evening.

Let us begin - In the Name of our Creator God who lavishly loves every person and every particle of creation, and of Jesus the Christ who loved us to his death, and of the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to enfold our world in justice, peace and harmony.

We invite the words and reflections of the bishops to move us to understanding, care and action.

Reader 1 Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful. . . .these acts reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love.

Reader 2 What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society. Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice *for all* is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey. . . .too often racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered.

In this regard, each of us should adopt the words of Pope Francis as our own: let no one “think that this invitation is not meant for him or her.”

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians (5:14)

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.

Reflection

Hi everyone,

For those of you who don't already know me, my name is Tiziana Green. I have been a parishioner of St. Pius X since 1979, when my family and I first immigrated to America. Yes, That's right, I'm an immigrant. We moved here from Sicily, Italy when I was seven. My parents struggled with the thought of leaving everyone they had ever loved, their home, their lives, but they felt that coming to America for a better life was an opportunity they couldn't pass up. It was their “American Dream”.

Being a “foreigner” as a child was hard. It seemed like everyone around me had blonde hair and blue eyes, and here I was -- the dark haired, dark eyed girl from another country who didn't speak a word of English. I

remember the first few weeks of school being teased and not understanding what was being said to me. I felt “different” and that I didn’t belong. That feeling stuck with me for a very long time.

So, why do I share this story? It is because I believe that it was my own immigrant experience that has shaped me into the person I am today, my perspective on life and on the world. I have always believed that getting to know people from other backgrounds is a gift, a way of learning about another culture without traveling there, a way of opening your mind to different perspectives through other people’s experiences. Because of my story, I believe, it has made me hungry to learn about others and to connect with them in a more authentic way. It has taught me to be humble and kind, to have compassion, and it has taught me the meaning of empathy --to understand what it feels like to be in someone else’s shoes

Maybe it was my being “different” and my love of learning about others who are different than me that drew me to the man I married. You see, my husband Rodney is black. We met in high school when I was just 16. I was very shy, quiet, and unsure of myself. He was outgoing, funny and made me laugh. I think what drew us to each other is that we both felt “different”. Me, because of never feeling like other American kids, and Rodney because he one of just a few black kids in a mostly white, Catholic high school. We became fast friends and eventually our relationship blossomed into love and after college, we got married. I was so happy to have married my best friend and was looking forward to our happily ever after. What I didn’t realize is that our happily ever after would be filled with painful challenges that the majority of couples & families don’t have to deal with.

As a biracial couple for 30 years, and married for 22 years, we have endured much, and as the wife of a black man, I have painfully learned that racism is very much alive. I could share stories that may seem unbelievable to you, yet that have happened to us here in Omaha. From disgusting graphic messages that read “N-word lover” and “Go back to Africa” being left on our car right here in the St. Pius X parking lot, to hate filled racist fliers left in our front yard. To when we were looking for our first house, we were steered to look in only a certain area of town (Of course we fired that realtor). But, my husband’s experiences when he was alone are even more hurtful and chilling. Everything from being turned down for a job, after he was seen as a “strong candidate” during the phone interview, but when he showed up for the in-person interview, he was told they weren’t hiring anymore. To being chased by a car full of angry white men who were looking to start trouble, to being pulled over by police on multiple occasions for no apparent reason and then being aggressively questioned almost in a way to make him lose his cool so that they had reason to detain him, to the countless amount of times he’s been racially profiled and followed by security guards while he’s in a store. There have been many other experiences have reminded him over and over again, that as a black man, he can never escape the inherent racial biases that society has placed upon him. Let’s face it, there are many stereotypes for black men in our country. They are often perceived as dangerous, scary, thugs, and criminals. Never mind that my sweet husband is a wonderful dad to 4 kids, a caretaker for his mom who is ill, a beloved soccer and basketball coach, an active member of our parish and our community, a small business owner, an artist, and that he is one of the kindest, most unselfish people, who would give the shirt off of his back to help someone else.

These experiences have followed us throughout our lives as a bi-racial couple and sadly, yes racism has impacted our children’s lives too.

We have 4 children, our son attends Creighton University, our daughter is a junior at Marian, and we have a son in 6th and a daughter in 4th here at St. Pius/St. Leo school.

As a young mom, I quickly realized that even though my kids had 1/2 of my DNA, and my genes, and that they came from two very rich cultures, they would be seen by everyone else as “black”. And that they would be treated as such.

From a very young age of 3 or 4, each one of my babies started saying things like “I wish I had peach skin like you” “I don’t want to be brown” and” “everyone says my hair is ugly”. The first time I heard these things, I

cried. I was shocked and saddened that at such a tender age, they already felt “inferior” to other kids. There was even an experience at daycare where my little boy had a crush on a little girl in his class, and one day she told him that “she didn’t want to be his friend anymore because my parents don’t like people with brown skin”. They were 5.

How could I have been so naïve to think that they would be treated like all the other kids at their predominantly white daycare and schools? I wanted each one of my kids to feel as beautiful as they are to me, to appreciate the beautiful color of their skin and for everyone to see them the way that I see them. I wanted them to feel PROUD of everything that they are.

As our kids have gotten older, we have had many difficult conversations at our kitchen table. We have heard their stories of being made to feel inferior or ‘less than’ even by people they thought were their friends. As parents, we have leveled with them that their lives will probably be more difficult than many of their white friends. That no matter how unfair, they’ll need to work twice as hard to prove themselves, so that they can have a chance to have some of the same opportunities afforded to them.

And we have had to have “the talk” with them. I’m not talking about the “birds and the bees”, but the talk about things they need to know to help them stay safe when they leave the house. We have tried to raise them as strong, respectful people who are also proud of their heritage, to always be the ones that set an example for others to follow, to help build bridges and to treat others as they would like to be treated.

As our nation experiences huge protests of recent racial injustices, these past few weeks have been extremely heavy and emotional for us as a biracial family. Injustices, inherent biases, and racial micro-aggressions have been part of our lives for such a very long time, we have sadly come to accept “that’s just the way it is”.

Even though there have been past civil rights movements I believe there is something different about this moment in time and that many are finally starting to understand some of the injustices that black people have had to deal with all of their lives. We are starting to realize the privileges that we have been afforded not because of anything we have done or didn’t do, but simply for being born with white skin... It’s as though a veil is finally being lifted from our eyes, an awakening of sorts. We appreciate it so much that friends are calling to check in on us, but in all honesty our lives haven’t changed much. Our friends have expressed disbelief that we have ever experienced racism here in Omaha. What I hope can happen is for more people to become aware that RACISM is very real, it is complex and multifaceted. It will take time and effort to untangle racism from the fabric of our society. We cannot change what we do not know, but now that we are beginning to know, it is incumbent on all of us to make a conscious effort to right the wrongs, to stand for what is right.

So, what can we do to make things better? How can we help make meaningful change?

- *First of all, we can start at home, with our own families at the kitchen table. Teach children about respect, tolerance, love, kindness, empathy. Teach them to be inclusive.*
- *Do an honest self-examination. Try to root out any biases we may have picked up from how we were raised, or may have been told.*
- *Educate ourselves about the African American experience and the systematic racism that has been woven into the fabric of our society for decades. There’s a saying that you have to know the past to understand the present. Once you learn the truth for yourself, you can’t unlearn it. Silence and passiveness is not an option. We must each take a stand for what is right.*
- *If we aren’t lucky enough to know people who are from different backgrounds, races, religions, or different countries, start there. When we meet someone not like us, make it a point to get to know them. Listen to understand their story, their experience, their perspectives and celebrate those differences. Use what we have in common to build bridges.*
- *See something, say something. When we hear someone talking down to minorities, or treating people unfairly, or talking about minorities in a disrespectful way, don’t stand for it. Speak up for what is right.*

- *Lastly, Be Kind. Remember the Golden Rule. Treat others like you would like to be treated.*

Recently someone said to me, "This, too, shall pass." This might be an innocent enough phrase to some. To others, it is a warning sign of apathy to come. Me? I don't want this to just "pass", I want it to be a turning point. A point that we can look back on and say this was when everything changed.

Song: Rain Down

Jaime Cortez (Used with Permission)

Refrain:

Rain down, rain down, rain down your love on your people.

Rain down, rain down, rain down your love, God of life.

Verse 1 Faithful and true is the word of our God; all of God's works are so worthy of trust. God's mercy falls on the just and the right; full of God's love is the earth.

Verse 3 God of creation, we long for your truth; you are the water of life that we thirst. Grant that your love and your peace touch our hearts, all of our hope lies in you.

Presider: In their pastoral letter the bishops call all Catholics to overcome the evil of racism by following a path springing from the words of the prophet Micah.

You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you:

Only to do justice and to love goodness,

and to walk humbly with your God. (Mi 6:8)

So what do the bishops tell us to do?? Let's listen to the steps they offer.

Reader 3 We must recognize the roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Love requires us to reach out generously to the victims of this evil, to assist the conversion needed in those who still harbor racism, and to begin to change policies and structures that perpetuate and preserve inequality, economic and social, and allow racism to persist. And to embrace the attitude that *overcoming racism is a demand of justice*.

Reader 4 If we are to be moved with empathy to promote justice, we must create opportunities to hear the tragic stories that are deeply imprinted on the lives of our brothers and sisters. We must invite into dialogue those we ordinarily would not seek out. We must work to form relationships with those we might regularly try to avoid. We must invite a change of heart in those who may be dismissive of other's experiences or whose hearts may be hardened by prejudice or racism.

Reader 5 In addition to individual personal work, we must also unequivocally demand concrete action advocating for equality in how laws are implemented and for moral budgets that reduce barriers to economic well-being, appropriate healthcare, education, and training.

Reader 6 Our parishes are challenged to make sure religious education programs for children and adults develop and implement curricula relating to racism and reconciliation.

Reader 7 The call of the bishops to all of us as members of the Body of Christ is to engage with renewed vigor, joining others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in

our civic and social institutions. And they especially remind us that we Catholics cannot accomplish this task in isolation and we that must work with others of all faith traditions to help repair the breach caused by racism, which damages the human family.

Reader 8 For the past weeks and tonight, we grieve especially deeply with the families of persons of color who have been killed during interactions with police officers. We reflect on the bishops' statement that despite the great blessings of liberty that this country offers, we also must recognize that for many, especially people of color, interactions with police can often be fraught with fear and even danger. At St. Pius X we are so deeply grateful for the many members of our parish family who have dedicated their lives to work in the area of law enforcement, daily putting their own lives in harm's way in order to create safety and protection for us and for all the residents of Omaha. And we are grateful that the bishops state in no uncertain terms that we must always reject harsh rhetoric that belittles and dehumanizes law enforcement personnel who labor to keep our communities safe and we must join the in condemning violent attacks against police.

Let us now bring our petitions before our Loving God

Reader 9:

The response to our petitions is Come Holy Spirit.

That your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease, we pray *Come holy Spirit*

That our actions will always flow from the command of Jesus to love our neighbor, so that we can partner with God in healing every wound of racial injustice, we pray *Come Holy Spirit*

For the grace to eliminate every trace of racism from our own hearts, from our parish community, from our social and civil institutions, from our neighborhoods, city, state and nation, we pray
Come Holy Spirit

That all the dedicated women and men in law enforcement in our neighborhoods, cities, and nation and especially the members of our own parish family who have devoted their lives to peace and justice through the profession of law enforcement be guided by their faith, cradled and protected in the strong arms of our loving God, and sent forth each day with our blessings, we pray *Come Holy Spirit*

Our Parish Commitment

Reader 10

The Black Lives Matter movement has taken center stage and unfortunately, it has been politicized by some which in some cases has led to more unnecessary and misplaced divisiveness. We must understand clearly that the Black Lives Matter movement does NOT mean that all lives don't matter. Of course ALL lives matter. What this movement is about is creating the space for our entire nation to become more aware of the systemic racism that black people have endured for centuries in this country and to find ways to eradicate it.

At this time, we would like to share the *St. Pius X Belief Statement of Solidarity on Standing Against Racism*

We believe, as the US Catholic Bishops teach:

- Racism is a sinful, destructive and persistent form of evil that still infects our nation.
- Individuals, communities, and churches cannot remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice.

In response to our Bishops and to the nationwide cries for justice in the wake of the death of George Floyd, St. Pius X affirms that Black Lives Matter and that no persons should have to live in fear because of the color of their skin. We believe that as St. Pius X we must act for a more just society and commit to:

- Grieving with families who have lost loved ones by acts of violence
- Listening to and validating the stories of racial inequity shared by our sisters and brothers
- Refusing to be complicit by our silence.
- Creating a team to develop an action plan for us as individuals and as a parish to address the sin of racism through
 - Education about racism
 - Acknowledging the reality of white privilege
 - Working with other people of faith to dismantle inhumane and inequitable policies and laws
 - Holding our leaders and institutions accountable, in order to bring about lasting systemic change and racial justice
- Praying as individuals and as a community

Presider: It is with confidence that I envision our parish as a beacon in our city in our commitment to address racism

by living out our statement, by doing justice,

by loving goodness

and by walking humbly with our God.

Let us pray

Reader 11

God of Love,

We ask that your Spirit now fill our hearts to overflowing that we might be healers of injustice,

That we may be washed clean of all judgment of others, bigotry, racism, and intolerance,

That the sin of racism might be reversed through us,

That our minds may be filled with your beautiful vision of unconditional love and acceptance of all people,

That our lives may be turned into instruments of resurrection,

That dreams of a nation committed to care for all persons might be realized through us,

And that we may we live in honesty, integrity and profound care for all our neighbors. AMEN

Presider: Let us go forth to make a difference in the world.

Closing Song:

**Go Make a Difference by Steve Angrisano and Thomas N. Tomaszek
Permission)**

(Used with

Refrain Go make a difference.

We can make a difference.

Go make a difference in the world. Go make a difference.

We can make a difference.

Go make a difference in the world.

Verse 1 We are the salt of the earth, called to let the people see
the love of God for you and me. We are the light of the world,
not to be hidden but be seen.

Go make a difference in the world.

Verse 2 We are the hands of Christ reaching out to those in need, the face of God for all to see. We are the
spirit of hope; we are the voice of peace.

Go make a difference in the world.

Verse 3 So let your love shine on,
let it shine for all to see.

Go make a difference in the world. And the spirit of Christ
will be with us as we go.

Go make a difference in the world.