



Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A
June 28, 2020

- ◆ **The U.S. Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Racism - Part 2**
- ◆ **How do we feel about the statement "Black Lives Matter"?**
- ◆ **A Gospel with several 'hard sayings'**

In case you did not read last week's column, it contained excerpts from the *United States Catholic Conference of Bishops'* Pastoral Letter on Racism, written in 2018. I admit I was not aware of the Letter until all of the recent protests against racism. I know some people have a problem with the rallying cry "Black Lives Matter" for at least two reasons: (1) for them, *all* lives matter, and (2) some elements of the movement are connected with extreme left wing groups. My interest here lies simply in the statement "Black Lives Matter."

I can see why some people may push back with the movement *Black Lives Matter* because they say that in God's eyes, *ALL* lives matter. Having said that, our history painfully shows that for hundreds of years in our nation, black lives did *NOT* matter, and if we take a close look at our society, we may have to sadly admit that in lots of ways our society values white lives more than it does black lives.

In a recent podcast I listened to, a woman who is a strong advocate for the rights of unborn children noted that in some quarters, the slogan *Unborn Lives Matter* would draw cheers, but she doubted that the statement *Black Lives Matter* would elicit the same reaction.

The gospel truth is that *ALL* lives matter. But the sad reality is that, in our nation, there is concrete proof that some lives do *not* matter—be it the unborn, the poor, the undocumented migrants, victims of gun violence in Chicago and elsewhere, etc. One could rightfully wonder where is the outrage against all these violent acts?

Acknowledging Sin

Now, to some more excerpts from the Pastoral Letter "Open Wide Your Hearts."

Acknowledging *our* sinfulness is not easy for any of us. But it is an *essential* part of the Christian life. Recognizing sinfulness requires the virtue of humility. The Pastoral Letter states:

The truth is that the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have been complicit in the evil of racism. In his Papal Bull Dum Diversas (1452), Nicholas V granted apostolic permission for the kings of Spain and Portugal to buy and sell Africans, setting the stage for the slave trade. Even though subsequent popes strongly renounced and rejected the international slave trade, much to our shame, many American religious leaders, including Catholic bishops, failed to formally oppose slavery; some even owned slaves.

We also realized the ways that racism has permeated the life of the Church and persists to a degree even today. "For too long," in the Church's missions throughout the world, "the way to a fully indigenous clergy and religious was blocked by an attitude that was paternalistic and racist." Not long ago, in many Catholic parishes, people of color were relegated to segregated seating, and required to receive the Holy Eucharist after white parishioners. All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others.

Therefore, we the Catholic bishops in the United States, acknowledge the many times when the Church has failed to live as Christ taught—to love our brothers and sisters. Acts of racism have been committed by leaders and members of the Catholic Church—by bishops, clergy, religious and laity—and her institutions. We express deep sorrow and regret for them. We also acknowledge those instances when we have not done enough or stood by silently when grave acts of injustice were committed. We ask for forgiveness from all who have been harmed by these sins committed in the past or in the present. (pp 21-22)

The Letter continues

To work at ending racism, we need to engage the world and encounter others—to see, maybe for the first time, those who are on the peripheries of our own limited view. Knowing that the Lord has taken the divine initiative by loving us first, we can boldly go forward, reaching out to others. 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. This demands that we go beyond ourselves, opening our minds and hearts to value and respect the experiences of those who have been harmed by the evil of racism. Love also requires us to 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. Only by forging authentic relationships can we truly see each other as Christ sees us. Love should then move us to take what we learn from our encounters and examine where society continues to fail our brothers and sisters, or where it perpetuates inequity, and seek to address those problems. (p.23)

The Letter states that all education and formation programs should do whatever it takes “*to break any silence around the issue of racism, to find new and creative ways to raise awareness, analyze curricular, and to teach the virtues of fraternal charity. We urge each person to consider the dignity of others in the face of jokes, conversations and complaints motivated by racial prejudice.*” (p.26)

We need to continue to educate ourselves and our people about the great diversity within our church. (p.27)

Racism - A Life Issue

Very often when many of us ponder over life issues, we only think of the unborn—which is of course very important. But now we also see racism as a life issue. The Pastoral Letter states:

The injustice and harm racism causes are an attack on human life. The Church in the United States has spoken out consistently and forcefully against abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, and other forms of violence that threaten human life. It is not a secret that these attacks on human life have severely affected people of color, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, targeted for abortion, have less access to healthcare, have the

greatest numbers on death row, and are most likely to feel pressure to end their lives when facing serious illness. As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue. Accordingly, we will not cease to speak forcefully against and work toward ending racism. Racism directly places brother and sister against each other, violating the dignity inherent in each person. The Apostle James commands the Christian: “Show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. (Jas 2:1) (p.30)

Reflection Questions

1. What speaks to you most in this section of this week's column? Why?
2. How do you feel about the statement *Black Lives Matter*?
3. Were you aware:
 - ◆ That a pope of our Church gave permission to Spanish and Portugal kings to sell and buy slaves?
 - ◆ That some bishops in our country actually owned slaves?
 - ◆ That there was a special section in catholic churches for black parishioners?
 - ◆ When you think of “life issues,” what normally comes to mind? Unborn? End of life? Capital punishment? Immigration? Racism? Climate control? Are any of these issues *not a life issue* for you?
 - ◆ Do you have any suggestions for me on how we as a parish could have meaningful conversations on the issue of racism?

For those of you who may be interested, you can find online a *Study Guide* to the Pastoral Letter “*Open Wide Our Hearts*”

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/study-guide-open-hearts-2019-09.pdf> (the link to the study guide)

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf> (the link to the pastoral letter itself)

A Gospel with several ‘hard sayings’ (Matthew 10:37-42)

This Gospel has two sections. The first contains a number of miscellaneous sayings by Jesus concerning the cost of discipleship. The second relates to the authority of the Apostles and the fate of those who welcome them.

In the first section, Jesus offers a number of what are sometimes called ‘hard sayings’:

- ◆ He who loves another more than Jesus is not worthy to be his disciple.
- ◆ He who fails to embrace the Cross is not worthy to be his disciple.
- ◆ He who seeks self-fulfillment more than self-surrender to Christ is not worthy of him.

In these “hard sayings,” Jesus is conveying to us that our commitment to him must supersede all other commitments and relationships, even those as binding and as precious as the relationship between a parent and a child. The Gospel does not advocate abandonment of familial ties and responsibilities, but places the commitment to Christ above all. The reality is, of course, if one is truly a committed disciple of Christ, he/she becomes more capable of loving family members and all others with a selfless love. The third “hard saying” reminds us that if we are only out to satisfy ourselves, we will in the end be losers. On the other hand, if we seek to give of ourselves, we become our best selves and most pleasing to God.

The second part of today’s Gospel calls us to be hospitable to those who carry the message of Christ to us. In welcoming the messengers of the Gospel, we are welcoming Christ himself. The gift of even a cup of water to little ones will not go unrewarded.

Reflection Questions

1. As you read the so called ‘hard sayings’ in today’s Gospel, which of them might you find hardest to embrace? Did you find the commentary on the Gospel helpful as you think about the hard sayings?
2. In the second part of the Gospel, Jesus speaks about hospitality. Would you consider yourself hospitable, friendly person in church, or do you tend to be the type of person who minds his/her own business?
3. Do you believe hospitality is a Gospel virtue?

These and so many issues are uppermost in our minds and deserve the prayers of our hearts. Starting Sunday, July 5, and every Sunday at 7:00pm, our parish community will resume praying the Rosary together

virtually. Each week, the intentions of the Mysteries will focus on a need relevant to us and our global community today. I hope you will join me in prayer.

And in a similar way, beginning Wednesday, July 15, at 7:00pm, we will be offering a Small Christian Community via zoom. Led by a team of skilled facilitators, we will proclaim the Sunday readings, read the commentaries I have written for further understanding, and reflect on God’s Word and its impact on our lives in this moment. We will virtually break into small groups to discuss and share our faith and then conclude together in prayer. I’m looking forward to this opportunity to drop in and visit with you. See page 6 for more information.

A Cup of Water

The following reflection is by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

In Ireland when we want to welcome a person we say, “Will you have a cup of tea?” How often we have said that to others, and how often others have said it to us. In itself, a cup of tea is a small thing. Yet it can make a person feel welcome.

This shows the importance of small deeds. Small deeds may not look much, but they create a friendly atmosphere. Small flowers give off little scent on their own. But put a bunch of them together, and they can fill a room with fragrance. The dawn chorus results from the singing of many little birds.

Jesus says that anyone who gives one of his disciples even a cup of cold water will be rewarded. Again, a cup of cold water isn’t much. It is the biblical equivalent of our cup of tea. To give a cup of cold water is about the smallest thing we could do for another person. Yet in the desert it could be the difference between life and death. Which shows that a deed doesn’t have to be big in order to mean a lot. Small deeds and small gifts are very important. Circumstances can magnify the effect of a small deed.

It’s not how much we do that matters, but how much love we put into what we do. The spirit in which a deed is done, the person to whom it is done, and the circumstances, can magnify a small deed.

A small deed can bring great comfort to a person provided it has a certain quality. That quality is warmth. All deeds that come from the heart have that quality.

Few of us are given the chance to perform great deeds. But the chance to give ‘a cup of water’ can come our way several times in the course of a day. The ‘cup of cold water’ is a symbol of the small kind deed. Little deeds may not look much, but they can bring peace.

Small gestures can tell us more about a person's character than big gestures. Big gestures show us a person's power. Small gestures show us a person's humanity.

Giving is at the heart of the Gospel. It is of the very essence of Christianity. It is through giving that the heart remains open and one becomes a loving person.

Story

The following story shows how important a small deed can be. The Irish writer, Oscar Wilde, made a reputation for himself as a fine writer, and was regarded as a celebrity as well. But then he was sent to prison (for having a sexual relationship with a young man). It was a terrible humiliation for him.

As he was being brought by two policemen from prison to court, a noisy, hostile crowd had gathered. But then a friend of his appeared, who made a simple gesture of friendship and respect that silenced the crowd. As Wilde passed by, handcuffed and with bowed head, this man raised his hat to him. It was a very small thing, yet it meant a great deal to Wilde at the time.

Reflecting on that simple gesture Wilde later wrote: "Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. I do not know to the present moment whether my friend is aware that I was even conscious of his action. It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure house of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I can never possibly repay.

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When Feeling Spiritually Dry

Dear Lord, in the midst of much inner turmoil and restlessness, there is a consoling thought: maybe you are working in me in a way I cannot yet feel, experience or understand.

My mind is not able to concentrate on you; my heart is not able to remain centered, and it seems as if you are absent and have left me alone.

But in faith I cling to you.

I believe that your Spirit reaches deeper and further than my mind or heart, and that profound movements are not the first to be noticed.

Therefore, Lord, I promise I will not run away, not give up, not stop praying, even when it all seems useless, pointless, and a waste of time and effort.

I want to let you know that I love you even though I do not feel loved by you, and that I hope in you even though I often experience despair; let this be a little dying I can do with you and for you as a way of experiencing some solidarity with the millions in this world who suffer far more than I do. Amen.

Fr. Henri Nouwen

The following is a beautiful night prayer.

With Jesus in the Night

God, good night.

Thank you for the day.

The good bits were good.

The tough bits are over for another day.

Help me to sleep well tonight.

Help me to face into another day tomorrow.

Bless and protect all my loved ones this night.

Bless and protect all those, too, with whom

*I disagree or with whom I don't get on—
they're your children too, I know.*

May tomorrow bring about your will for the world—peace, love, joy and mercy.

May I play my part. For now, good night, God.

I love you and know you love me, warts and all.

(Sacred Heart Messenger, August 2020)

Have a blessed week,

Le Saran