

### ***Bishop Edward C. Malesic Statement - February 2023***

*To follow Jesus, we must stand against the inhumane treatment of others – a special message from Bishop Malesic.*

As Catholic Christians, we know that God created us in his image and likeness; each of us is a unique and beautiful reflection of our creator. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ, yet what we see in the news regularly is division – whether it's based on the color of our skin, our political affiliation, our religious beliefs or other differences that lead to the inhumane treatment of others. We must recall that Jesus prayed just before he died that we might all be one. We also know that united we stand, divided we fall. I'm inviting everyone to reflect on one particularly painful sin of division – racism – and ask that you consider ways to actively reject this insidious evil wherever it is found.

In 2018, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement, "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism." In that document, the bishops stated: "Racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor it."

The statement went on to say: "What is needed ... is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society. 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."

As you reflect on this, I ask you to join me in prayer, using these beautiful words from St. John Paul II:

"Lord our God, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters."

We should pray, too, for ourselves, that we will never fail to understand that our power as followers of Jesus comes in our loving one another. We not only pray for victims of the sin of racism, but for all victims of discrimination, violence and abuse, from conception to natural death.

An African American saint in the making is the Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman, who inspired people of all races to work together for the justice that leads to peace. Sister Thea, at a meeting of USCCB in 1989 said, "The Church is a family of families, and the family (has) got to stay together ... if we do stay together, if we walk and talk and work and play and stand together in Jesus' name – we'll be who we say we are – truly Catholic. And we shall overcome – overcome the poverty – overcome the loneliness – overcome the alienation and build together a holy city, a New Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know that we are here because we love one another."

May we, as faithful Catholics, lead the way to a vision that Jesus has for this world, where we are all sons and daughters of God, and all brothers and sisters to each other. May we ask the Lord to wash away the ashes of sin in our own hearts, and replace them with the waters of grace – so that we may worship in spirit and in truth, proclaim the Gospel in its beauty, and serve the Lord with gladness.