

A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land

Introduction

"Racism has rightly been called America's original sin. It remains a blot on our national life and continues to cause acts and attitudes of hatred, as recent events have made evident. The need to condemn, and combat, the demonic ideologies of white supremacy, neo-Nazism and racism has become especially urgent at this time. Our efforts must be constantly led and accompanied by prayer—but they must also include concrete action." [1] People of faith call on the Divine Physician, Christ the Lord, to heal the wounds of racism throughout our land.

Opening Prayer

Wake Me Up Lord [2]

Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism
finds no home within me.

Keep watch over my heart Lord,
and remove from me any barriers to your grace,
that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters.

Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give
services of justice and peace.

Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.

And finally, remind us Lord that you said,
"blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God."

Amen.

Reading from Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Pastoral Reflection

As we heard in the Gospel reading, the question is posed, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus is ready, answering with a parable. Jesus often used parables to shed light, bring new insights, and provoke a change in the hearts of listeners. We hear that someone is robbed, beaten and injured. Two walked by, ignoring the injured man, but a third came to the man's aid, caring for his wounds and securing him safe lodging. He was the good neighbor. He was acting like Jesus, doing what God required.

Keeping this in mind, consider the scenario we are witnessing today as racism persists in our communities and in our churches. Too many walk by the victims of racism without looking deeply at their wounds or the pain inflicted on them. Many of these wounds have festered over centuries. Today's continuing disparities in education, housing, employment, economic well-being, and leadership are not disconnected from our country's shameful history of slavery and systemic racism. Any act of racism injures the perpetrator and the victim, threatening the dignity of both. The failure to act to end systemic racism, which is

often animated in our laws, policies, and structures, hurts those who are victimized and denies all of us the opportunity to benefit from the gifts of diversity.

Jesus' parable calls us to our obligations as Christians, to be a good neighbor: the one who stops and helps the injured; the one who does not hesitate to accept the responsibility of healing.

The signs of this time are asking us to wake up, to stand up and to speak up when we see racism. This is how we love our neighbor as ourselves. This is how we act like Jesus. This is how we do justice and love goodness (Micah 6:8). This is how we make safe lodging for all. This is how we begin the healing from racism in our land, writing a new parable of racial justice for this time.

The U.S. bishops teach: "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" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*, 1979). In "The Challenge of Racism Today," Cardinal Wuerl's pastoral letter to the Church in Washington, he writes: "To address racism, we need to recognize two things: that it exists in a variety of forms, some more subtle and others more obvious and that there is something we can do about it. We must confront the issue with the conviction that in some personal ways we can help to resolve it."

The sin of racism is evil and needs to be wiped out. Too many times, miseducation has blocked the path to racial healing. Too many times, apathy has hindered the road to racial healing. People of faith are called to attend to the wounds of racism with prayer and action—to move out of pain to healing by transforming systems and structures that perpetuate injustice. As Cardinal Wuerl said, we must recognize that we can do something about racism.

Examination of Conscience: A Look at Myself in the Mirror

Conscience is the "core and sanctuary" within us where we are alone with God and hear his call to "love good and avoid evil" and "do this, shun that." [3] Let us examine our conscience in light of the sin of racism, asking ourselves:

1. **Have I** fully loved God and fully loved my neighbor as myself?
2. **Have I** caused pain to others by my actions or my words that offended my brother or my sister?
3. **Have I** done enough to **inform myself** about the sin of racism, its roots, and its historical and contemporary manifestations? Have I **opened my heart** to see how **unequal access** to economic opportunity, jobs, housing, and education on the basis of skin color, race, or ethnicity, has denied and continues to deny the equal dignity of others?
4. **Is there** a root of racism **within me** that blurs my vision of who my neighbor is?
5. **Have I** ever witnessed an occasion when someone "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and I did or said nothing, leaving the victim to address their pain alone?
6. **Have I** ever witnessed an occasion when someone "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism with *me* inflicting the pain, acting opposite of love of God and love of neighbor?
7. **Have I** ever lifted up and aided a person who "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and paid a price for extending mercy to the other? How did I react? Did my faith grow? Am I willing to grow even more in faith through my actions?

I recognize that racism manifests in my own individual thoughts, attitudes, actions, and inactions. It also manifests in social structures and unjust systems that perpetuate centuries of racial injustice. [4] For my individual actions and my participation in unjust structures, I seek forgiveness and move towards reconciliation. I look into my heart and ask for the will and the strength to help contribute to the healing of racism in my time.

Act of Contrition

Let us pray the Act of Contrition:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen. (Or: "to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.)

I Seek Forgiveness and Reconciliation to Act Justly

It is written in Ezekiel 36:26: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Pope Francis reminds us that the Lord "calls each of us by our name: he knows us by name; he looks at us; he waits for us; he forgives us; he is patient with us." [5]

Receiving God's grace and forgiveness requires a response. Pope Francis encourages the believer: "Whoever experiences Divine mercy is impelled to be an architect of mercy among the least and the poor." [6] Now let us do what God requires:

"Only to do justice and to love goodness

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

Closing Prayer

God of Heaven and Earth,
you created the one human family
and endowed each person with great dignity.

Aid us, we pray, in overcoming the sin of racism.
Grant us your grace in eliminating this blight
from our hearts, our communities,
our social and civil institutions.
Fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbor
so that we may work with you
in healing our land from racial injustice.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

We have prayed and now, with changed hearts, let us move our feet to action.

Opportunities for Action

*Note to facilitator: Following the conclusion of this reconciliation service, share with participants opportunities to work for racial justice in your faith community, neighborhood, or the wider community. For ideas, visit usccb.org/racism including prayer resources, study materials, and ideas for action. Also see *5 Ways You Can Cultivate Peace and Work for Racial Justice*.*

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[1] USCCB Executive Committee [statement](#) in support of the establishment of a new Ad Hoc Committee on Racism in September of 2017.

[2] This prayer is from *For The Love of One Another* (1989), a special message from the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Pastoral Letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the U.S. Catholic bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism (1979).

[3] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16. Before we can examine our consciences, we must ensure that our consciences are properly formed. This involves being open to the truth and what is right, studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church, examining the facts and background information about issues, and prayerfully reflecting to discern the will of God (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 18).

[4] For more information, see the USCCB backgrounder, "[Racism: Confronting the Poison in Our Common Home](#)."

[5] Pope Francis, [General Audience](#), May 17, 2017.

[6] Pope Francis, [Homily during Celebration of Penance](#), March 28, 2014.