



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

Office of the Bishop

“My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time, we have to recognize that “the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost”.

~Pope Francis, General Audience, June 3, 2020

Seeking God’s grace to help us combat the sin of racism: a pastoral reflection

by Bishop Paul J. Bradley

My dear friends, as we all are painfully aware, we’re living in a very tumultuous, anxious, and greatly divided time in our country. Tensions are high, anger is great, peaceful protests against racism and social injustice are widespread, and sadly, some of those protests have turned violent, and destructive, including here in our own community. I’m reminded of St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians, and us, to “mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11).

St. Paul’s words could not be more appropriate as to what we all need to do to confront the sin of racism. As people of Faith we are called to a higher standard. God created all human beings—individuals who are made in the image and likeness of God, who are equal in the sight of God, and whose Son God sent into the world to bring salvation to *all* human beings. And our responsibility as baptized members of the Body of Christ is to love God, and to love one another.

And so, using St. Paul’s words, we must *mend our ways, encourage one another, find a way to respect and love one another, so that we can live in peace*. We cannot ignore what divides us; we must resolve what divides us in a way that respects the dignity of every person, and in a way that acknowledges our dependence on God.

Our progress begins with us and with a true conversion of heart. We can, as a start, consider making three resolutions: to pray, to engage in dialogue, and to actively participate in advancing Jesus’ Kingdom here among us.

1. **Prayer.** We need to pray for the end of racism and for peaceful resolutions. We need to pray that each of us can be peace-makers, in the example of Jesus, and not contribute to divisions in our primary relationships, as well as in all our other social and work relationships. I encourage you to seek the intercession of our Blessed Mother, to whose maternal care and protection we’ve consecrated our Diocese, by praying the rosary, together with your family or by joining with others in giving organized prayerful witness to the dignity of all human life.

2. **Dialogue.** We can engage in true civilized and respectful dialogue which seems to be a lost art these days. We need to understand one another, and the only way that can take place is through dialogue—exchanging ideas—and seeking understanding and shared peaceful solutions to bettering our world. I encourage you to read the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter, ***Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love***, and consider using it as a discussion guide with your families and/or your friends.

3. **Active Participation.** Finally, we need to actively participate in building up the Kingdom that Jesus announced: “The Kingdom of God is at hand”. Every time we pray the Our Father, and pray “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, that’s what we are meaning. Additionally In this diocesan Year of the Eucharist, we have the opportunity to focus on the gift of the Eucharist, a Sacrament of Unity. Jesus gave us the Eucharist to help us to live together as One, united in Christ and to live the mission through practicing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, through works of charitable outreach to those who are in need and marginalized, and through practicing patience and understanding with all whom we encounter.

Just as God lives together in perfect harmony and unity as the Trinity of Persons, so too should we be committed to finding ways to keep building that Kingdom of God here on earth.

God is a Trinity of Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—living in perfect Love and Harmony with one another. And Jesus has come to teach us that as God lives in communion within Himself, so does He want us to live with God, but also to live with one another, in that same kind of unity, fellowship and love.

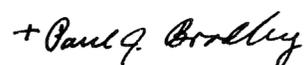
Listen to what Jesus tells us (cf. Jn 3:16-18): “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” God is not about condemning, punishing, or rejecting. God only wants to be One with us, and He wants us to be One with Him.

My dear sisters and brothers, we know there are no quick fixes to eradicating all prejudice, racism and unjust actions. However, we cannot sit silently by as members of the Body of Christ; rather we must answer the call to do what we can to work toward a conversion of heart for all people.

May we ask God to help us mend our ways, see each other as Children of God made in His image and as such encourage one another, agree with one another and live in peace; then, the God of Love and Peace will be with us. As Christ poured Himself out for others, let us pray for the grace to do the same as we sacrificially pour ourselves out for the well-being of others—all others, at all times.

And let us live in unity with one another, following the example of the Blessed Trinity, just as we pray at Mass: “*Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever. Amen.*”

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul J. Bradley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley

Additional Resources:

Prayer to end racism: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/Prayer-to-Overcome-Racism.pdf>

“Open Wide our Hearts: an enduring call to love”, a pastoral letter against racism <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf>