

STEPS toward OPENING WIDE OUR HEARTS

WHAT IS RACISM?

DO JUSTICE

The native American Experience

The African American Experience

The Hispanic Experience

LOVE GOODNESS

The Urgent Call of Love

WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD

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. Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39).

...The fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and—all too often—hatred.

Racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. ... [Needed] is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society.

We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just.

DO JUSTICE

“Whosoever loves God must love his brother.” (1 Jn 4:21)

We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just.

Listen and know the stories of our brothers and sisters, ... the historical and contemporary experiences of Native and African Americans.

The Native American Experience

St. John Paul II recognized when he met with Native peoples in 1987: “The early encounter between your traditional cultures and the European way of life was an event of such significance and change that it profoundly influences your collective life even today. That encounter was a harsh and painful reality for your peoples. The cultural oppression, the injustices, the disruption of your life and of your traditional societies must be acknowledged.”

...

The forced relocation of peoples occurred again and again due to the idea that if the indigenous peoples “interfered with progress they should be pushed aside.” In many boarding schools and orphanages, the objective was to “Americanize” Native children by forcing them to abandon all facets of their culture, including their native languages. In the words of the superintendent of one school, the goal was to “kill the Indian, and save the man.”

...

Yet, in the order of natural justice, these acts done in the power of Christ’s Spirit are overshadowed by the devastation caused by policies of expansion and manifest destiny, fueled by racist attitudes, that led to the near eradication of Native American peoples and their cultures. The effects of this evil remain visible in the great difficulties experienced by Native American communities today. Poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, poor schools, the exploitation of natural resources, and disputes over land ownership are all factors that cannot,

and should not, be ignored.

The African American Experience

As this country was forming, Africans were bought and sold as mere property, often beaten, raped, and literally worked to death. This form of slavery, known as chattel slavery, was different from and far more brutal than the slavery known in ancient times. Racial categories, which classified different ethnic communities as different races, some even as subhuman, were used to justify this new form of slavery. The injustices of chattel slavery were horrifying and lasted for generations. Families were separated, marriages were forbidden or dishonored, and children were maltreated and forced to work. After slavery ended, many former slaves faced continued servitude in the evolving economies that once relied upon their labor, and blacks encountered new forms of resentment and violence. In freedom, millions of blacks lived in constant fear for their lives. Most resided in extreme poverty and endured daily indignities in their interactions with whites. Efforts to advance out of poverty by working a small farm, owning a business, building a school, or forming a trade union generally met fierce resistance throughout the country. For so many, the right to participate in the political process would be withheld or severely hindered for another century.

Consistently, African Americans have been branded, by individuals, society, and even, at times, by members of the Church, with the message that they are inferior. Likewise, this message has been imprinted into the U.S. social subconscious. African Americans continue to struggle against perceptions that they do not fully bear the image of God, that they embody less intelligence, beauty, and goodness. This reality represents more than a few isolated stories; it was the lived experience of the vast majority of African Americans for most of our national history.

...

Still, to understand how racism works today, we must recognize that generations of African Americans were disadvantaged by slavery, wage theft, “Jim Crow” laws, and by the systematic denial of access to numerous wealth-building opportunities reserved for others. This has left many African Americans without hope, discouraged, disheartened, and feeling unloved. While it is true that some individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity.

The poverty experienced by many of these communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility.²⁰ The generational effects of slavery, segregation, and the systemic use of violence—including the lynching of more than 4,000 black men, women, and children across 800 different counties throughout the United States between 1877 and 1950—are realities that must be fully recognized and addressed in any process that hopes to combat racism.

The Hispanic Experience

Of course, experiencing racism is not limited to African or Native Americans. Many different groups of people have encountered “in varying degrees the evil of discrimination, racial prejudice, and oppression that endangers the very fabric of American society.” Some of the same patterns of prejudice and discrimination have been repeated. At this time, we would be remiss not to highlight the experience of Hispanics in our country. Since the Mexican-American War, Hispanics from various countries have experienced discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare, and education. Hispanics have been referred to by countless derogatory names, have encountered negative assumptions made about them because of their ethnicity, have suffered discrimination in applying for college, for housing, and in registering to vote. Despite their sizable share of the U.S. workforce and their numerous contributions to U.S. economy in many different fields and industries, the large income gap between Hispanic and European Americans points to the persistence of certain discriminatory practices in employment and pay. In the not too distant past, Hispanics encountered signs in restaurants and shops that read, “No Mexicans or Blacks Allowed.” Moreover, there have been over 550 documented cases of Hispanics being lynched, and experts estimate that the number could actually be twice as large.

Hispanics are the major target of immigration raids and mass deportation. In the past, U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent caught up in these raids have been deported. Today, many Hispanics are often assumed to be in this country illegally. These attitudes of cultural superiority, indifference, and racism need to be confronted; they are unworthy of any follower of Christ.

...

LOVE GOODNESS

When we begin to separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons, when we start to see some people as “them” and others as “us,” we fail to love. Yet love is at the heart of the Christian life. When approached and asked what is

the greatest commandment, Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39). This command of love can never be simply “live and let others be.” The command of love requires us to make room for others in our hearts. It means that we are indeed our brother’s keeper (see Gn 4:9).

...

Once “we have come to the conviction that one died for all”—and not just for ourselves—then “the love of Christ impels us” to see others as our brothers and sisters (2 Cor 5:14). For, “if [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor 12:26). It is the love of Christ that binds together the Church, and this love reaches out beyond the Church to all peoples. This love also requires justice. “If we love others” with charity,” as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, “then first of all we are just toward them.”

...

WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD

- Steps to Be Taken: Walking Humbly with God

1. Acknowledging Sin
2. Being Open to Encounter and New Relationships
3. Resolving to Work for Justice
4. Educating Ourselves
5. Working in Our Churches
6. Changing Structures
7. Conversion of All
8. Our Commitment to Life
9. Going Forward

Evangelization, which is the work of the Church, “means not only preaching but witnessing; not only conversion but renewal; not only entry into the community but the building up of the community.”

...

Acknowledging Sin

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.

...

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.

...

Changing Structures

The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality—economic and social—that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on the members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions.

Conversation of All

Conversion is an essential aspect of evangelization, which “is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment.”

...

Going Forward

There is no place for racism in the hearts of any person; it is a perversion of the Lord’s will for men and women, all of whom were made in God’s image and likeness.