



open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Scripture Reflection: Unity in the Body of Christ

In November 2018, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a new pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. In their letter, they invited all people of faith to “join us in striving for the end of racism in all its forms, that we may walk together humbly with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in a renewed unity.” Use the reflection below to aid you in prayerfully discerning how you may be called to respond to this invitation.

Introduction

St. Paul teaches us that all people are united together through the love and life of Jesus Christ. He uses the image of the body to express how people can be united even if they are different from one another. St. Paul emphasizes that the different members of the body all play an essential role. Each part of the body has a distinct function, as well as inherent dignity as part of God’s beloved creation.

As you listen to this reading, reflect on the way that the Body of Christ today is made up of diverse people, who are all different but are all essential to make the Church healthy and whole. How does the evil of racism frustrate God’s design of a diverse but united human family in which everyone is recognized as a valuable and vital member of that family?

“Every racist act – every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin – is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.”

– U.S. bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

Reading from Scripture

1 Corinthians 12: 12-14, 16-21, 24-26

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Reflection

This passage from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians calls us to celebrate the differences between the different members of the Body of Christ. Just as a body needs an ear, an arm, and every other part to be whole, the Church, as the Body of Christ, needs every one of its diverse members to be whole. We must ensure the well-being of each of its parts.

Racism is an evil that divides our neighborhoods, our cities, and our country. Like an illness that weakens a physical body, racism weakens the Body of Christ. Any act of racism is a sin that harms both the perpetrator and the victim and denies the dignity of both.

Racism manifests itself in an individual's thoughts, attitudes, actions, and inactions. It also manifests in social structures and unjust systems that perpetuate centuries of racial injustice. In solidarity, we are called to share the suffering of our sisters and brothers in Christ who have been wounded by the evil of racism. Their wounds are the pain of the whole Church. In the same way, when we take on the responsibility of healing racism, we imitate Jesus, who heals us of all sin and spiritual sickness.

"We pray that the reader will join us in striving for the end of racism in all its forms, that we may walk together humbly with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in a renewed unity."

– U.S. bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

Here are some questions we can use to examine our participation in racism through our thoughts, attitudes, actions and inactions:

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 evil 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 experienced personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and I did or said nothing, leaving the victim to address their pain alone?

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6. Have I ever been in a situation when someone experienced personal, institutional, systematic or social racism—and I helped to cause their pain, acting contrary to love of God and love of neighbor?
7. Have I ever supported or aided a person who experienced personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and paid a price for it? How did I react? Did my faith grow? Am I willing to grow even more in faith through my actions?
8. How am I called to respond to the evil of racism?

At usccb.org/racism, find ideas about how you can respond to the call to help heal racism and read the Pastoral Letter in its entirety.

This resource is excerpted from:

- *The Creating on the Margins Contest Packet. Visit usccb.org/youthcontest or usccb.org/concurso-juvenil to learn more about *Creating on the Margins*, a contest for youth in grades 7-12 that educates youth about poverty in the U.S. and our Catholic response. The 2018-2019 theme is “A Time to Heal Racism.” The contest is sponsored by the *Catholic Campaign for Human Development*.*
- *[A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land](#)*



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