



REPARATIONS AND RACIAL JUSTICE: A REFLECTION ON *DILEXIT NOS*

by Bishop Joseph Perry, Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism



For many, the word “reparations” evokes thoughts of monetary compensation. But within the Church, it carries a deeper, more transformative meaning—one rooted in healing, truth, and love. In *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis offers a beautiful reflection on the powerful love of the heart of Christ. A devotion to the Sacred Heart might lead us to reconcile our human hearts to one another. In the Catholic tradition, reparation is not a transaction, but a sacred offering—one that involves not only words, but gestures. Just as the Sacrament of Penance invites physical expressions of contrition—making the sign of the cross, performing a penance, offering restitution—so too do acts of reparation in communal life require gestures of sincerity, and concrete actions.

In seeking authentic reparation and reconciliation, we must first recognize our own humanity and brokenness. This sacred offering is similar to what we all experience in the Sacrament of

Reconciliation, where we come before God not only to confess our sins, but to participate in the healing of relationships, between ourselves, others, and the divine. Reparations is a movement of the heart. Reparation, then, becomes a path toward restoring relationships fractured by sin—a way of building, as Pope Francis writes, “a new civilization of love” amid the ruins we have left behind.

Sin, especially social sin, leaves lasting damage. Pope Francis reminds us that every sin harms not only the individual but the community. Racism is a stark example. In their 1979 pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the U.S. Catholic bishops named racism as a sin that divides the human family and violates the dignity of those made in God’s image. This sin persists today; woven into policies, institutions, and even the life of the Church. Its wounds remain open, and its legacy continues to harm.

The sin of racism continues to fester in our nation, in part because there has been no sustained process of truth-telling, atonement, or reconciliation. As the U.S. bishops affirmed in *Open Wide Our Hearts*, “too often, attempts to heal the wounds of racism have been sporadic and discouraged.”



The absence of formal acknowledgment—the failure to confront the full weight of historical and ongoing harm—allows denial and indifference to take root. Without a collective reckoning, the wounds remain open, and the call to justice remains unanswered. When we have the courage to name and acknowledge past wrongs, we open the door for reparations. We see signs of hope where communities regularly recognize the harm of racism and collectively entering into prayer and conversation. For example, the Archdiocese of St. Louis’ annual Maafa prayer service and procession, the Archdiocese of Detroit’s Mass of Pardon, and listening sessions in many dioceses around the nation shed light on how the Church participated in the sin of racism and is now moving towards reparation.

In *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis calls us to “mend the wounded hearts where the deepest harm was done” (*Dilexit Nos*, no. 185). This is not a passive invitation. Authentic reparation demands more than regret or distancing ourselves from past wrongs. It requires communal courage, sincere acknowledgment, and a willingness to ask forgiveness. As Pope Francis writes, Christian reparation must begin with “the honest acknowledgment of the wrong done” and the realization that love has been compromised.

To confront racism, we must begin with reparation. We must name the sin, seek forgiveness, and commit to healing, and concrete actions to correct past wrongs and present-day inequities.

This is the work of reconciliation. It is the work of justice. And it is the work of love.

In this sacred labor, we are not alone. We are drawn into the Sacred Heart of Christ, where divine love meets human suffering. The Sacred Heart is the living source of mercy, justice, reconciliation, and reparation. In the Sacred Heart, we find the courage to face the truth.

May we recommit ourselves to this sacred task. May we offer our hearts, build anew from the ruins, and become agents of justice and mercy in Christ.

Use the resources and materials on [this page](#) to reflect more on this invitation to deepen in relationship with the sacred heart of Christ.

In Christ,

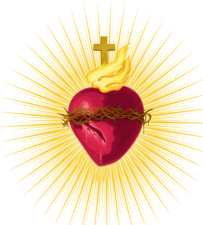


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