

Former police officer found guilty on all three counts in death of Floyd

Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin is seen near a picture of George Floyd in this courtroom sketch from a video feed March 29, 2021. After about 10 hours of deliberation, jurors issued their verdict April 20 convicting former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the death of George Floyd. (CNS photo/Jane Rosenberg, Reuters)

By: Catholic News Service

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MINNEAPOLIS (CNS) — A jury found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin guilty on all three counts April 20 for the death of George Floyd, after deliberating for about 10 hours over two days.

Chauvin, 45, was found guilty of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. His bail was revoked and he was remanded into the custody of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office.

As soon as it was announced midafternoon that the jury had reached a verdict, a crowd began forming in front of the Hennepin County Government Center, where Chauvin's trial was held.

Floyd, 46, an African American, died May 25, 2020, while in police custody. He was arrested after a store clerk accused him of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill, and Chauvin, who is white, restrained Floyd, pinning him to the ground by kneeling on his neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds — all of which was captured on a bystander's video that went viral and sparked local and national protests and riots.

During the trial the prosecution called Chauvin's actions "unnecessary, gratuitous and disproportionate." The defense argued Floyd died because of the drugs in his system and underlying heart issues.

As the Chauvin trial progressed, Daunte Wright, another African American, was killed by a white police officer during a traffic stop April 11 in Brooklyn Center. Wright struggled with officers trying to arrest him after they learned he had an outstanding warrant.

In a statement on the website of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the state's seven bishops and diocesan administrators said the trial had "reopened questions throughout Minnesota about the impact of racism in our society and culture."

"As leaders of the Catholic dioceses of our state — pastors of multiracial, multicultural flocks from all walks of life — we acutely feel the anxieties in our communities, along with a thirst for justice and a longing for a path to a more peaceful life together as sons and daughters of God."

Referring to the 2018 U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on racism, the bishops said it was "a sad and undeniable truth that racial prejudice and discrimination continue to impact the

lives and livelihoods of millions of U.S. citizens. There is far too much evidence that prejudice has an impact in criminal justice matters, influencing not only the way individuals are treated by some police and court systems but also the rates of incarceration. Whatever the verdict may be in the Chauvin trial, the church remains committed to providing long-term leadership in eradicating structures of sin and racism in Minnesota and beyond.”

They said anger and hatred could not prevail. “The violent protests of these past months across our country have done very little to improve the lives of people of color living in intergenerational poverty or to address their basic needs for good schools and safer neighborhoods for their children, access to capital to start businesses, better social services, and support for marriages and families.”

“As a diverse community, the Catholic Church is committed to changing hearts and minds and to moving the conversation about race in this country beyond accusations and recriminations toward practical, nonviolent solutions to the everyday problems that are encountered in these communities. We will continue to do this through teaching the truth of human dignity, offering charity to our neighbors of every race, and advocating for those who are most vulnerable.”

The day before the Chauvin verdict was announced, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda and priests across the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis offered special Masses “For the Preservation of Peace and Justice.”

Addressing a congregation of about 120 people at the Cathedral of St. Paul’s 7:30 a.m. daily Mass in St. Paul, the archbishop referred to the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in St. John’s Gospel and Philip’s temptation to do nothing in the face of the challenge to feed the crowd.

Like Philip, people might feel the magnitude of problems in today’s society are too overwhelming and be tempted to do nothing at all in the face of them, the archbishop said.

“We can’t control what happens in the trial,” the archbishop noted. “We can’t single-handedly force healing to those who feel the wounds of racism in our land. We can’t bring George Floyd back to life, or Daunte Wright back to life. Does that mean that we do nothing? Absolutely not.

“We each have to offer our five loaves and two fish, no matter how meager,” he said. “We gather this morning to do just that. To offer our humble prayers. They’re pretty meager. They’re not much different than the loaves and fish. But we offer them to Jesus, and let him work the miracle.”

Throughout Chauvin’s trial and in the wake of Wright’s death, police and Minnesota National Guard units have been activated in the Twin Cities to help maintain peace.

Over the three-week Chauvin trial, the jurors heard dozens of witness testify; after closing arguments, they were being sequestered for their deliberations.

In his homily at the Mass for peace, Archbishop Hebda recalled when he first began serving at Mass, in about the fourth grade, and being intrigued by the priest offering one drop of water to the chalice during the presentation of the gifts for consecration.

He asked about that, and the priest explained that it represented people's offering their sacrifice to the sacrifice of Christ.

"That drop, one drop in a whole chalice, might seem inconsequential," the archbishop said. "But the priest is required to do that at every Mass. We'll do that here, this day. We give the little that we have, and it's Jesus who does the rest."

The archbishop assured the congregation that God hears people's prayers, and he closed his homily with one:

"Let us pray that he would send down his wisdom and prudence on the jurors, who have been given the weighty responsibility of deciding Mr. Chauvin's guilt or innocence; that he would help us to receive the verdict with peace; that we would open our hearts to whatever conversion is needed there and that he might continue to bless our cities and our communities with the fruits of the peace and justice that only he can bring."