

# My homily on racism: ‘Dear Lord, make us instruments of your peace’



Deacon Greg Kandra | Aug 13, 2017



*After preaching a homily at the Vigil Mass last night, I went home and wrote a new homily for this morning.*

**Last night, I discovered a timely essay by Father Brian Massingale, a Jesuit theologian at Fordham.**

He wrote about the life of 21-year-old Dylann Roof. Many of you remember the name. Two years ago, Roof went into the basement of a Methodist church in Charleston, South Carolina, where he pulled out a handgun and opened fire. He killed nine people as they said prayers, sang hymns and studied the Bible.

Dylann Roof was white. Every one of the victims was black.

It was a crime that shocked and sickened the world. Roof later confessed that his motive was very simple: he hoped to ignite a race war. Dylann Roof was a racist.

It's tempting to think of people like Dylann Roof as godless or faithless, believing in nothing but the hatred in their hearts. But that wasn't the case. Father Massingale pointed out a disturbing detail from Roof's journal.

Amid all the pages filled with rants about his resentment toward black people, and images of the Confederate flag, was a drawing, sketched in pencil, of an instantly recognizable figure.

It was a drawing of Jesus.

It was later revealed that Dylann Roof was a baptized Christian, a Lutheran who knew his catechism and went to church on Sundays. His father, in fact, went to church twice a week and was active in his parish.

The irony was inescapable—but maybe not surprising. Father Massingale noted that racism—what has been called “America’s original sin”— just isn’t something you hear about much in church.

Given the events of the last 24 hours, I think it is time for that to change.

The psalm we heard a moment ago speaks of a kind of paradise:

*“Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss.”*

Tragically, we are so far from that paradise. Our broken, bloodied, battered world cries out for justice and peace.

The question this morning: How can we make it happen? What can we do?

Well, a good place to begin is with understanding that what the world witnessed yesterday in Charlottesville, Virginia was not only abhorrent. It was not only tragic.

### **It was evil.**

If you’ve never heard this from a pulpit before, you’re going to hear it now. Let this be engraved on our hearts: racism of all kinds—white against black, black against white, any one expressing hatred for another because of the color of his skin— is evil.

In Catholic teaching, racism is considered an *intrinsic* evil—on a par with abortion, assisted suicide and torture.

In moral theology, this means it can never be justified. It is always, under every circumstance, evil.

And the events of yesterday serve to remind us, with even more urgency:

### **We need to stand up to this evil and bring it to an end.**

This goes beyond politics. As many people mentioned last night on social media: there are no two sides to this issue. There is only one side. We can only stand against it.

As a church, we have been very effective at mobilizing people to pray for an end to one of the great scourges of our time, abortion. We have marched, we have picketed, we have rallied and prayed and campaigned. We have made it the defining life issue of our time.

Well, consider this another life issue. Racism is inherently anti-life. It mocks the creator. It defiles his creation. And it inflicts more wounds on the Body of Christ.

We need to bring the same kind of energy and zeal that we used to battle abortion—in politics, in prayer, in personal reflection and personal courage—to battle racism.

To begin with, that means zero tolerance.

It means having zero tolerance for racist slurs or racist taunts or jokes.

It means making our leaders in government and politics accountable. It means pushing them to disavow support from white nationalists and white supremacists and hate groups of all kinds and all colors.

**It means creating a culture of life in which we strive, above all, to give dignity to all life, at all times, in all circumstances.**

As St. John Paul put it: “To oppose racism we must recognize in every man and woman a brother or sister with whom we walk in solidarity and peace.”

It means teaching our children something all of us should know in our hearts: that we are all made in God’s image, whether black or brown or white or yellow.

Ultimately, it means working for a world where “kindness and truth shall meet, where justice and peace shall kiss.”

In 1979–38 years ago—the U.S. bishops released a prophetic letter, “Brothers and Sisters to Us.”

“Racism,” they wrote “is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society.”

They added: “In order to find the strength to overcome the evil of racism, we must look to Christ. In Christ Jesus ‘there does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freedom, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.’ As Pope John Paul II has said so clearly, ‘Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is — toward Christ our Redeemer.’”

**Remember this: We must look to Christ.**

Like Peter in today’s gospel— frightened by the wind and the waves, sinking in a stormy sea—we look to Christ. We cry out to him for help.

In our turmoil, we look in desperation and hope to the Prince of Peace.

A prayer attributed to that great deacon St. Francis of Assisi pleads to God to make us “instruments of his peace.”

It asks God to help us sow love where there is hatred...pardon where there is injury...and hope where there is despair.

It is a prayer in which we ask nothing less than to become, in fact, like Christ.

During this troubled time, no intention could be more important, no work more sacred.

As we prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist, then, let us pray, as a popular hymn puts it, to “become what we receive.”

Let us begin the great work, person by person, heart by heart, to heal this broken, brutalized, bloodied world. The work begins here and now.

My brothers and sisters, pray for Charlottesville.

Pray for its victims.

And: pray for our country.

**Dear Lord, make us instruments of peace.**

<https://aleteia.org/blogs/deacon-greg-kandra/my-homily-on-racism-dear-lord-make-us-instruments-of-your-peace>