

Prayer for Peace and Racial Harmony in Our Communities

Holy Cross Catholic Church – Austin

June 9, 2020

Reflection by Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez

Bishop of Austin

(read by DeKarlos Blackmon)

Dear brothers and sisters, I apologize for not being able to join you this evening but want to take this opportunity to express my thoughts and reflections with you regarding the killing of Mr. George Floyd. As many of you are, I too am angry and disgusted. When I first saw the video of a law enforcement officer, someone who is supposed to protect and serve, placing his knee on the neck of Mr. Floyd, I was offended. It became even more unsettling as I heard Mr. Floyd begging for his life when he said, “I can’t breathe, I can’t breathe.” Mr. Floyd’s death is tragic and should have never happened – we witnessed a killing. It is unacceptable and shows a complete disregard for George Floyd’s human rights and dignity.

Sadly, we have seen this type of abuse repeated time-and-again to people of color, particularly black Americans. The indignation and anger that people have experienced these last few weeks have motivated tens of thousands around the world to march in protest, expressing solidarity for those men and women who are unjustly treated because of their race or color of their skin.

Racism has been tolerated far too long in our society. We need to call it what it is: racism is sinful and evil. Brothers and sisters, we must be bold enough to confront this evil and find ways to eliminate it in our communities. We must also hold accountable those criminal justice and law enforcement officers who have abused their authority with brutality. We cannot allow things to continue the way they have been with people’s unalienable rights being violated. The violent death of George Floyd moves and challenges us to work for reform and to bring about justice for all, especially for those who are victims of racism and, indeed, those who have lost their lives.

God created every human being in his image and likeness; we are all precious in his sight and loved unconditionally. Every person must be respected and valued because they reflect God’s presence in our world. God has given each of us an inestimable dignity that can never be taken away. We must defend and protect one another to be truly human; anything else denies human dignity and harms every person in our human family. If we believe this, then we must treat those around us as true brothers and sisters. In doing so, we can call ourselves sons and daughters of a loving father. If we do not believe and do this, how can we dare call God, “Our Father?”

As we pray for victims, we also pray for those in law enforcement who carry out their duties with integrity for the common good. There is no doubt that good officers suffer as a result of the sinful actions of their peers. As the African American spiritual states, everyone is “standing in the need of prayer.” So, what we are doing here tonight is very important as it reminds us that we are children of God. We are responsible to one another. This prayer service is meant to inspire us to work hard to bring about change. But, our prayer cannot end this night. We cannot expect to simply pray this away without putting forth a concerted effort to effect meaningful change in our communities and our relationships with each other.