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Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone Statement on the 50th anniversary of King Assassination

As we observe the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the great civil rights apostle of peace and justice Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we recognize that too much of our present reality is not so different from that of 1968. Many in our country continue to suffer from racism, violence and discord – accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and dismay.

Pope Francis, in his 2015 address to the U.S. Congress, counted Martin Luther King, Jr., among four Americans he admires. The Pope also referred to Dr. King in the encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*, noting how the civil rights leader “met every kind of trial and tribulation with fraternal love.” We can all draw inspiration from Dr. King’s own words during the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.”

Christ died and rose again for our salvation; for the salvation of the whole world—as Christians commemorate in Holy Week and Easter Sunday. It is from Christ’s love, which inspired Dr. King, that we can draw strength, guidance and inspiration in these troubled times. But we have to *do* something about that, not let it remain an inspiring thought.

Driving down a street in San Francisco the other day I saw an advertisement with a picture of Abraham Lincoln with the caption: “civility is within you.” He set us on the trajectory that culminated in the civil rights legislation for which Dr. King gave his life. But there is still much work to do, and we can make an invaluable contribution simply by living the civility that is within us. Our times are plagued by rancor, name-calling, detraction and polarization. Let us draw strength, guidance and inspiration from Dr. King by being civil with each other, especially with those we dislike and with whom we disagree. This is how we live his witness to non-violence in everyday life, and so prove ourselves worthy of his legacy.

On the anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination we honor a life devoted to peacefully advocating for justice, against racism and for civil rights. While much remains to be done, Dr. King’s contribution to American society remains lasting and transformative and his peaceful advocacy for justice marks a path forward for us today.