

Dear Friends:

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' final command to His followers was to "wait in the city, until you are clothed in the Spirit from on high." To wait, literally, to "settle into," was a curious command. Jesus asked His disciples to "be settled" in that same city where violence was normative, where Jesus was unjustly murdered, where the disciples feared also for their own lives. Jerusalem, the city where God was to reside with His people in peace and blessing was anything but, and yet, this place of unrest and violence was the very place where God was to reveal the power of transformation, first in the resurrection, and later, in the promise of the Spirit. God seeks to give to all the power of the Spirit, that is, the power to convert/to change, which is really the strength to realize ones need for change within one's own heart, and with that to trust that the goodness of God can, by divine grace and our cooperation, overcome all contradictions, whether within ourselves, or within our society. And so we, like the disciples, are called to "settle into" the heart of conflict and violence, that we too might come to recognize our part in our shared human condition. When we are willing to do so, this place of unsettledness becomes in fact the starting point from which God's transformative power seeks to give birth to peace. Those early disciples found it, and even though locked into their own fear and prejudice for a time, were able to eventually bring to birth a community that regarded neither free nor slave, male or female, rich or poor, Greek or Hebrew, but only all in one through Christ.

This is the power of Pentecost, and it is still at work in us, seeking to continually bring about a needed conversion of heart, mind, and manners in our lives and society. Now more than ever we need to heed the call to change, to conversion into the ways of a God who desires only peace and blessing. For we are once again faced with the tragedy of an unjust killing of a person of color in our city, the Twin Cities, the entire world now witnessing the disease smoldering among us for far too long. The attempted arrest of George Floyd, for a \$20 petty offense, has revealed a dark, unyielding truth about the nature of our lives here, and it is a painful recognition. Too many in our city suffer too much from the ignorance, indifference, or exclusionary intent of the many more who enjoy the benefits of an inequitable social contract.

From the standpoint of faith, this revelation first and foremost calls for conversion. Casual indifference to the suffering of so many, while we go about wondering when our lives may be returned to normal, is a fundamental failure to recognize the Spirit offering us the means to a deeper conversion. This conversion demands first that we see, and no longer excuse, our shared reality. Ignoring the mistreatment and injustices regularly visited upon our neighbors of color should never be tolerated, within ourselves, by means of indifference, or within our society, by means of unjust policies and laws. The shame rests squarely upon our shoulders if we fail to recognize this, and so act to eradicate this indifference and inequity.

The violence, looting, and destruction of property we have witnessed in the last three days is in no way justified or acceptable. We feel strongly about that, and rightly so. And yet, as strongly as we feel about that, do we feel as strongly about injustices visited upon people of color in our own community? Are we willing to "settle into" the uncomfortable reality that is our city, and to look into, honestly and without excuse, the mirror that is being held up in front of everyone

who calls the Twin Cities home? A mirror that reveals a city egregiously segregated along racial, economic, and educational boundaries, where the riches and benefits of our social order are shared with some, but withheld from many others? The world is watching us now. Now can we recognize the desire of the Spirit of God calling us to conversion of heart and mind? This conversion should challenge us when we feel in our own hearts the pangs of apprehension, fear, and mistrust in the presence of people of color, an experience that contributes in its own way to continued segregation. Conversion of heart should help us realize we cannot rely solely on a change in law, as changes in laws can only take root when the people who are subject to a law intend to fully realize its effects, not ignore, or obstruct, its intent.

As we celebrate Pentecost, we remember that the Spirit desires to share grace with all people, in abundance, overflowing and to great measure, bringing forth the fruit of peace and justice that is the very life of God. But this peace cannot be realized without first the hard, painful work needed in the hearts, minds, and manners of everyone who enjoys the benefits of the social contract, while ignoring those among us who live in despair, who do not share in the educational, social and economic benefits we far too often take for granted. If these days of discontent unsettle us, then let it be done for the cause of serious self-reflection, an honest appraisal of the injustices built into the social order we may benefit from, but an order that nonetheless works to the detriment of others, who suffer daily the often invisible indignities of deprivation. As strongly as we denounce the senseless looting, vandalism, and violence we have witnessed, so must we as a community formed in the gifts of the Spirit, denounce every form of racial bigotry and prejudice, within us and around us, and any form of casual indifference that contributes to the suffering these prejudices inflict on our neighbors.

We are called to make a firm, unflinching promise before God and to ourselves, and to our brothers and sisters who suffer so unjustly these many sins – to George Floyd and the many who have inexcusably suffered the same fate before him, to his family and friends who feel most personally this grief – that we will do all we can to drive out any vestiges of indifference, prejudice, or bigotry from our own hearts, seeking instead the peace and justice that God wishes to share with us through the outpouring of the Spirit. We who have looked upon the events of this past week with wonderment, dismay, fear, anger, frustration, helplessness, may we "settle into" the heart of this violence that is injustice, as did the followers of Jesus who waited in a city filled with that same fear and anger, that we too may see clearly the reality we occupy, and the long, hard, but blessed road of conversion that comes with this sight. If we are willing to look and to see the need for justice in the lives of our neighbors, then and only then can we lay claim to the joyfulness we seek to celebrate this day of Pentecost.

Our prayers are with George Floyd today. May he live now in the peace of God through the mercy of Christ, a mercy that embraces in heaven those countless souls who have suffered murder at the hands of unjust power. May Mr. Floyd's family and friends find that same peace in their heart. May peace be with those who seek to protest, peacefully protest, that they too may share in the hope for a normalcy and security that should be the birthright of all who call this city home. May peace be upon the brave police and military who seek to keep everyone safe while having to confront, up close and personally, the rage that is now forcing all of us to

take notice. And may the peace of that same Spirit come upon all of you, remaining with you always, that you may know this peace and so share it faithfully with a waiting, wounded, unsettled city.

Fr. Joe Whalen

Feast of Pentecost, May 31, 2020

Please also follow this link for a statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2020/20-83.cfm>