



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Communications • *The Long Island Catholic* • *Fe Fuerza Vida*

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DATE: June 5, 2020

RE: Racism and George Floyd

FROM: Most Reverend John O. Barres, Bishop, Diocese of Rockville Centre

Before the Civil War there was a block of stone on what later became the Belmont Abbey College property in North Carolina. It was called the “Slave Stone” because slaves being sold at auction were made to stand on that stone so that potential buyers could see them.

Years later, the Stone was turned and refashioned into a baptismal font that is now in the entryway of the Mary Help of Christians Basilica on the Belmont Abbey College campus. A plaque was placed on this font that is there to this day that connects the Waters of Baptism with the freedom to be children of God.

A slave rock transformed into a baptismal font is a powerful image that can help us to rediscover the relationship in our Catholic faith between repentance and conversion, and social change.

Each one of us today opens our hearts and lives to the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of the Holy Trinity within us and the power of the Body and Blood of Christ to transform us, heal us, inspire us so that we can be instruments of Spirit-driven social change that rejects hatred, violence, racism and blindness and embraces the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

Imprinted in this stone was the emotional memory of the coarse cruelty of the slave traders and the anguish and trauma of slave families being separated and further stripped of their human dignity. The Slave Stone carried some of the emotional imprint of the stones of Calvary itself as do historical images from our nation’s history of lynchings, Jim Crow laws, film footage of fire hoses turned on African Americans engaged in peaceful civil rights protests and now, the recent horrific video we all saw depicting the tragic and senseless killing of George Floyd, a man who was in police custody on a Minneapolis street.

On behalf of the faithful of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, I express my heartfelt prayers and condolences to the Floyd family. We pray for peace on the streets of our cities. We pray that peace, charity and justice may animate non-violent protests. We pray for our public servants, our police, our first responders and their families. We pray for the witness of our Church and the ecumenical and interfaith witness we have with our brothers and sisters of different faiths.

On Friday, September 25, 2015, Pope Francis celebrated Mass in New York City at Madison Square Garden. In his homily, he reminded us of Christ’s presence in every city around the world.

He said: “Knowing that Jesus still walks our streets, that he is part of the lives of his people, that he is involved with us in one vast history of salvation, fills us with hope...A hope which makes



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us see, even in the midst of smog, the presence of God as he continues to walk the streets of our city. Because God is in the city.”

We pray for peace on the streets of our cities and for justice. We pray for a powerful awareness, as our Holy Father says, of the presence of God as Jesus walks and carries His Cross through the wounded streets of our cities. Two years ago, on April 4, 2018, we commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and I shared a Pastoral Letter “*The Dream and Our Deepest, Truest Selves*” which has been reposted on our DRVC.org website. Little did we know as we prayed and prepared for that 50 year commemoration of Dr. King’s death how relevant it would be two years later.

Allow me to share a brief section of it: “With the help of God, whose love he preached so fervently, Dr. King’s sacrifice tipped the scales of human history and brought us closer to the fulfilment of a dream, one that recognizes the dignity of men and women of all races, one that recognizes that the sanctity of human life is the foundation of every human right, and one that recognizes the rich contributions and legacy of African Americans in our country.”

May each one of us stir the flame of Christ’s love and peace at every moment and in every situation in these painful and traumatic days.