

Now is the Time to Speak Out

by Deacon Joseph Connor

At this moment in time and in this year of 2020, it is most critical that we, Catholic clergy, religious and parishioners address the sin of racism that is destroying communities and families of color around the nation.

The incident in Minnesota, with the killing of George Floyd, on Monday, May 25, 2020 was very traumatic and disturbing. Incidences such as the one in West Baltimore involving Freddie Gray, in Ferguson, Mo. involving Michael Brown and in Northern California involving Oscar Grant are just a few examples of incidences between officers of the law and Black men that were also traumatic and resulted in the deaths of these unarmed Black men.

Watching the recent killing of a Black man was sickening and outrageous. This was a tragic and deplorable event. It clearly speaks to the disregard for the life of another Black man. This event brought back to my mind the ill treatment and disrespect that I was a victim of on many occasions while living in the south, in Long Beach, California and here in Seattle, Washington.

This entire incident from beginning to the fatal end was indicative of blatant racism. Institutional racism so deeply embedded in our society that it has become “normal” to justify and accept the killing of an unarmed Black man. The pandemic coupled with these recent injustices have pushed the issues of racial disparity into the open.

What happened to, “we are one nation under God indivisible, with liberty and justice for all”?

As Catholics, we cannot stand by and not respond to incidents of blatant racism and injustices. “What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1927)

As bishops, priests and deacons, our task as preachers is to name the incident for what it is, racist. We must speak against the sin of racism, and call for action that stands for justice. We must not pass up an opportunity to address a sin that permeates the everyday existence of Black people.

To help in our preaching opportunity, a book titled “The Red Record - Alleged Causes of Lynching” written by Ida B. Wells in 1895 can be one reference guide. By replacing the word “lynching” with “killing of unarmed Black men” the information in this book seems like it was written in the year 2020.

The Bishops letter on racism “Open Wide Our Hearts”, can be a very good tool to begin dialogue, and develop strategic plans to seek justice and fairness. Now is the time Catholic commissions and councils to write letters, make statements, and write resolutions that

- call for an investigation into this historical pattern of killing unarmed Black men and the unlawful attacks on accused persons that deny them due process of law,
- condemn the killing of unarmed Black men,
- demands the same investigation, litigation and punishment for law officers who unnecessarily take the life of an unarmed Black person
- require National, State and Local government to make laws that help discourage the devaluing of the lives of Black men

My brother clergy it is time for us to not only pray, but act and show our solidarity towards action to eradicate this horrible sin. Peace!

Deacon Joseph Connor
Immaculate Conception Seattle