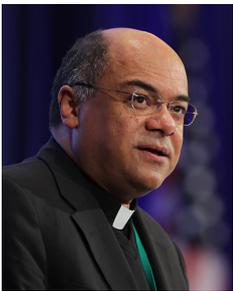


Racial injustices 'are a full-on attack on the dignity of human life,' says bishops' committee against racism chair



Bishop
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We have witnessed a blatant and horrible injustice that has shaken our nation to its core. A police officer killing George Floyd, an African American man, by kneeling on his neck on a street in Minneapolis has caused outrage in our country and throughout the world. George Floyd's inexcusable death has ignited the justifiable anger and frustration that has been simmering just beneath the surface of American society for quite some time. In just over the span of a week, we have witnessed peaceful protests, as well as violence and riots. While we may be alarmed by the violence, should we really be surprised?

Unfortunately, throughout American history African Americans have been subjected to unjustified violence at the hands of some in authority. The most recent scenes from across our country are simply the latest expression of frustration on the

part of African Americans in response to this never-changing history of violence. When viewing television news channels or perusing social media, we immediately find that the legitimate grievances of peaceful protesters are sometimes disregarded because, regrettably, the expressions of violent civic unrest consume the news cycle. In this way, the systemic problems of racism being peacefully protested and lifted up again quickly fade into the background, where they can continue to be unheard, overlooked or ignored.

Violence diminishes everyone, and it is never an answer. In a statement released by me and six other USCCB committee chairmen, we not only plead for peaceful, nonviolent protests, but also affirm that we stand in passionate support of communities that are understandably outraged. We express the certain reality that "too many communities around this country feel their voices are not being heard, their complaints about racist treatment are unheeded, and we are not doing enough to point out that this deadly treatment is antithetical to the Gospel of Life." The injustices people of color have been experiencing are a full-on attack on the dignity of human life. Just as the Church in America speaks out consistently against abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and other forms of violence that threaten the dignity of human life, we must also speak out about how racism threatens and is an attack against the dignity of human life.

While there are voices that will attempt to minimize the gravity of these current circumstances, we must stand firm and strong in our defense of every human life. Every one of us is wonderfully and fearfully made in the image and likeness of God. It is for this reason that every human being has an obligation to further the values of life, charity and justice, which help to make Jesus Christ more evident in our world. St. Paul tells us God "has reconciled the world to himself in Christ ... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18-19).

Christians and all people of goodwill possess an inherent responsibility to further Christ's work of reconciliation, particularly when injustice, racism and other divisive issues are manifested in society. No matter where in life any of us find ourselves, we must make evident our passion for the defense and dignity of all human life.

As Catholics, to say that we defend the sanctity of all life would seem to be intuitively obvious. However, at the same time, it is heartbreaking that, in 2020, we face the reality that not all Catholics respond passionately to the injustice experienced by people of color. The Lord is calling us to an authentic conversion of heart, a conversion that will then drive us to undertake actions that will overcome the efforts of those who sow racial division and hate. We will usher in a more complete understanding of the sanctity of all human life when we collaborate with one another to find inventive ways to encounter and accompany not only the marginalized, but also challenge those who refuse or fail to see and acknowledge the gross injustices around them.

As in all things, we place our confidence in Our Lord, Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are brothers and sisters to one another. With Christ, we stand in the spirit of justice, love and peace. Through Christ, we envision the new city of God, not built by human hands, but by the love of God poured out in Christ Jesus. On the journey to that "new heaven and new earth," we make our way with faith in God's grace, with hope in our own determination, with confidence in the workings of the Holy Spirit, and above all with love for each other as children of God. As I ask the Lord to "comfort my people," it is my prayer that with God's help, we shall overcome racism, which erodes the sanctity of human life.

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