

Archbishop Lori's Remarks: April 29 Listening Session on Racism

Good evening, and thank you all for being here tonight for this very important event. Bishop Fabre and Bishop Ricard, on behalf of everyone in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, I want to extend my warm gratitude for your presence this evening. I assure you it means so much to all of us that you have devoted your valuable time to supporting our efforts to address the important - and difficult - topic of racism. Thanks as well to our three auxiliary bishops for joining us - Bishop Parker, Bishop Brennan, and Bishop Madden. Bishop Madden thanks especially for your passion in leading the work of the Archdiocesan Workgroup on Racism, and to the members of the workgroup for their generous service.

Sherita, I certainly want to say a word of thanks to you for so graciously moderating our listening session this evening. You've done a wonderful job of making us all feel welcome, and of keeping our program running smoothly. And I must also acknowledge the wonderful music that has graced our program, thanks to the St. Bernardine Church Choir.

Most of all want, I of course want to thank our very courageous and generous speakers tonight, who have dared to share their personal, and often very painful, stories with us. I am so very sorry for what you have endured, and for the ways explicitly and implicitly that the Church played a role in your experiences.

I do not want to take away from the impact of what we have heard tonight by adding too much more to what has already been said. If I might, I'd simply like to highlight some of what I've heard, and then say a few brief words about where we might journey next as we take to heart these stories.

One clear and inescapable message that came through to me tonight is the reality that racism spans so very many aspects of our Church, as it does our society. It is entrenched in our past and continues today. It exists on a personal level and permeates our institutional and social structures. It uniquely affects our African American community given the tragic circumstances of their enslaved ancestors, but also harms our Latino sisters and brothers and all people of color. It is patent to those who experience it, and often denied or ignored by those who perpetrate it.

Like everyone in our audience tonight I am sure, I was deeply moved by each speaker's presentation, and by the many walks of life and varied aspects of our Church's life that they represent. Whether young or older; lay, religious or clergy; native born or hailing from another country, they together have painted a sad mosaic of the sufferings they have endured at the hands of our very own Church. To repeat just a few examples: Imagine having to ask yourself the question, "How much of a threat is my blackness perceived in the sanctuary while I am celebrating the Eucharist?" Imagine being rejected in the generous act of bringing Communion to the sick. Imagine having your mind blown by the simple act of sharing a Coke from the same bottle with a friend.

While I am so grateful to our speakers for sharing these hard truths with us, my gratitude is most inspired but something else I heard, again and again. I heard incredible words of faith, and hope:

- "I am here because of the steady guiding, transforming Hand of God."
- "Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become."
- "The Eucharist speaks a universal language, one that we all understand. We are all one at that precious moment, without any divisions or barriers."
- "It is in the home where one both finds - and offers - sanctuary. The homefront can indeed be a major resting place along the road to healing racism."

To be honest, I find these expressions of faith, of hope, of love, almost astonishing. I am not for a moment suggesting that the responsibility for righting the wrongs of racism should rest on the shoulders of those who bear its burden. That responsibility lies squarely on those of us who have for too long turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to its reality in our midst. But as several of our speakers pointed out tonight, at a time when many in the secular society around us are so committed to addressing the issue of racism, imagine what we can do as a Catholic community, grounded in our common faith in the Eucharistic presence of Jesus among us. What a witness it is to us tonight to hear woven into these painful stories the amazing strength of God's grace, and His healing forgiveness. Again, I am deeply grateful to each of you for the redeeming gift of your faith.

As we leave tonight, I hope you will walk away confident that the experience we have shared here is only a beginning. As I've outlined in my recent pastoral letter on racism, the Archdiocese is committed to continuing to organize forums throughout our institutions to discuss and address the issue of racism, and I commend the many efforts that those who have organized the Racial Justice Circles have already begun in this area. We are committed to examining the diversity of our institutions - at every level - and to taking the steps necessary to ensure people of every race and ethnicity are not simply welcomed, but embraced and empowered to be leaders among us. And finally, I promise that I will continue to listen, to express my sorrow to those who have suffered, and to pray to God for his guidance in discerning the steps I must take to bring His healing to our Church and the world around us.

I ask in closing that you pray for me as well. Thank you.