

# Remarks by Carole Norris Greene

I was baptized Catholic as an infant in 1948. I was nurtured in a welcoming parish here in Baltimore, St. Peter Claver at Fremont and Pennsylvania Avenues. I grew up focusing on the mystery of God, His love for mankind and pondering why Jesus *had* to go to the cross to take our place.

It wasn't until I stepped outside of my comfort zone as a teenaager at St. Peter Claver that I was shocked to discover that I wasn't as welcomed in some other parishes. I don't need to reveal a litany of the slights. But I will share one in particular because it is a sad example of what the church still has to deal with today. It is the resentment of members who feel more entitled than others to bear the identity of being Catholic.

It was the early '60s. Mom's job then was at a popular restaurant in Jessup, Maryland. I worked with her some weekends. We would catch a Greyhound bus before 6 a.m. to get there.

On the Feast of the Holy Family, Mom and I, my older brother and his girlfriend who had just converted to Catholicism, wanted to worship as a family. So we found a church with a 5 a.m. Mass near the bus station. To catch the bus on time, we had to leave immediately after receiving Communion.

To our horror, the elderly priest who had celebrated Mass called out, "Look at the people leaving the Mass before it's over! It's a disgrace! I'll bet they didn't put 50 cents in the collection!"

He was so angry! (And wrong, for I put all the money I had in that basket.) Would he have gotten angry with anyone regardless of race who left Mass before the final blessing?

We were the only people of color in attendance. We took his condemnation personally. We lost my brother's girlfriend that day. She never came back.

Despite the humiliation, thanks to Mom I considered the problem to be the priest's. He had to deal with it.

I went on to fully embrace my faith in the coming years. I served on two of the U.S. bishops' subcommittees on liturgy. I became the founding director of the Office of Black Ministry for the Diocese of Brooklyn in New York.

But when I looked back over my life as an African American Catholic in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and in other dioceses where I worked for 17 years, I saw something alarming: *I couldn't point to one person whom I invited to consider being Catholic like me!*

I realized too that what had stunted my motivation to go beyond highlighting cultural contributions of blacks to Catholicism to actually inviting others to consider becoming Catholic was racism, an evil that holds that one's own race and even culture are superior to others'.

Memories of having been unwelcomed in certain Catholic settings made me not want to introduce such a dilemma in another's life.

The late Franciscan Archbishop James Patterson Lyke of Atlanta, Georgia, whom I knew and greatly respected, said that the power of the Gospel is blunted when it is wedded to only one cultural expression.

We would do well to bear in mind his insight as we work together to undercut all forms of racism that infect both church and society.

Racism is especially damaging when it finds expression among Christ's ambassadors, we who are *commanded* to be the bearers of the Lord's message of love and redemption.

Accepting Jesus as one's Savior, the Bridegroom of one's soul, *is a highly personal choice with eternal consequences. It is as intimate a decision as choosing a spouse in this life!*

So, why would anyone want to learn of his or her Heavenly Suitor at the hands of rejecting, disgruntled messengers? Racists, therefore, get in the way of the Lord's courtship of His people!

As such, addressing racism is serious business, and I am excited that Archbishop

Lori and others in leadership here are making its defusion a priority.

I have long held that the best way to defuse beliefs of superiority among people is to help them to get to know each other better. With knowledge, appreciation is possible.

I further believe that there is no better place for this to occur than on the homefront.

Greeting each other in our respective homes levels the playing field. We all get a chance to be in charge, to be the head person no matter how exalted or humble our dwelling.

We can offer refreshments, talk about our family, neighborhood, ambitions, even trials. And we can invite guests to do the same, listening attentively to their stories.

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.

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