

Remarks by Ludiya Abdalla

I had a unique experience with racism within the Catholic Church from a young age. Growing up, Catholicism was not only part of my life, but my community. In the early years of my life, I remember thinking the Catholic Church was a place of happiness and a diverse beautiful faith. As I got older, I realized this was a fantasy. The Catholic Church I began to know was a place of ignorance, racism and people who naturally imposed the views of neo-colonialism. From being looked at as a black person first, then a Catholic, to seeing how strict the Catholic Church was at sticking to their “values”.

At times it was harder than others being a black Catholic. I could recall times at Mass, when the priest would say words in a manner that seemed ignorant. Or when people from non-western cultures would praise in a manner that they are accustomed to. The stares and annoyed faces from all around could be viewed from rows down. Or even at moments of giving thanks to other members of the church, I can recall people ignoring my family and never wanting to shake my hand. It was times like these that my young mind would believe that’s just the way things are supposed to be. But no, that is not how things are supposed to be.

In my community made of up of both South Sudanese Muslims and Catholics I always had the events connected with the church. I never thought that the Catholic Church had any form of racism until my later years. The first sign of embedded racism I noticed, was that black people within our community could never advance within the Catholic Church. For example, there were many South Sudanese men that wanted to be a priest and for some odd reason, they could never become a priest. That ended up dividing our community and leaving more men to open up their own churches. Second, there was always a disconnect between the white and black youth, in the sense of what would occur within the church. I found myself in an awkward middle where I did not understand why I was being treated differently based on the color of my skin.

I’m in the church that I love so much. Ever since I got to Baltimore, I noticed the Catholic Church has an interesting divide here that has economic and societal implementations. I hope that one day I am able to enjoy being both black and

Catholic and expressing that to the world.

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