

SUGGESTED POINTS OF REFLECTION TO PREPARE THE HOMILY FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 27:30 - 28:9

Psalm 103:1-2 / 3-4 / 9-10 / 11-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

Preliminary Note

The purpose of these comments is to offer some points that will stimulate your prayerful preparation of the homily. **It is not a homily outline.** It is not a scholarly document.

On the liturgical Memorial of Saint Peter Claver, September 9, was observed as a day of prayer and fasting for the cause of racial justice. On the weekend of September 12 & 13, we respectfully ask for priests and deacons to consider preaching a homily on the need for Catholics to contribute to this cause for racial justice.

Notes for reflection

The liturgical memorial of Saint Peter Claver was celebrated on September 9. Many Catholics observed it as a day of prayer and fasting for the intentions of: (1) making reparations for the sin of racism; and (2) asking for God's help to cooperate with God and one another to persevere in the struggle for racial justice.

Saint Peter Claver lived from 1580 – 1654. From the Catalonia region in Spain, he was called to become a consecrated religious and a priest in the Jesuits. He served as a missionary in the nation of Colombia in South America for 38 years. . He provided for the spiritual and physical needs of Africans who were enslaved there. He impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Recent events have been part of our nation's centuries-old struggle to address racial inequities and to strive for racial justice.

Five years ago,, in the wake of the death of Freddie Gray and subsequent civil unrest, Archbishop Lori has called for members of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to strengthen our contributions to the public square in dealing with these issues.

Two pastoral reflections by Archbishop Lori:

- “The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Principles of Nonviolence”
<https://www.archbalt.org/kingpastoral/>
- “The Journey to Racial Justice: Repentance, Healing, and Action”
<https://www.archbalt.org/racismpastoral19/>

We approach these issues from the perspective of being disciples of Christ, who has who are striving to be faithful to the Gospel of Christ, and are striving to follow Him as members of the Church of Christ.

It is part of our mission of evangelization, the preaching of the Gospel and practicing its message in our lives.

Matthew 18:21 – “Peter approached Jesus and asked him, ‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?’”

- The context of the discussion between Jesus and Peter is the need to be reconciled when one has offended another. How long must we work at being reconciled with one another?
- Acknowledging wrongdoing, offering to make amends, and extending forgiveness are key actions of reconciliation.
- Offering forgiveness does not excuse or minimize wrongdoing. It does not prevent us from pursuing what is just. It does not give anyone permission to trample upon our dignity and to exploit us.
- Reconciliation leads to the establishment of right relationships. The offender acknowledges their wrongdoing with the intention of making amends for their behavior. The person who was offended gives the offender the chance to do it.

Matthew 18:22-23a – “Jesus answered, ‘I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to ...’”

- Jesus says that we must always hold out for the possibility of reconciliation rather than holding on to a desire for revenge.
- How do we apply this to the situation of racial justice in our nation and around the world? Since its beginning, our nation has been profoundly affected by the sin of racism.
- Racism is the belief that one’s ethnicity and cultural heritage is ethnic group is inherently superior than other ethnicities and cultures. (This definition is not complete, but it is a start.)
- Racism is a sin against the inherent dignity of every human life.
- Every choice has a consequence for ourselves and others.
- The choice to be racist is not just a personal choice. We have seen how it has treated persons as if they were just property to be bought and sold. We have seen how it has influenced public policy; such as *de facto* and *de jure* segregation; policies regarding housing, neighborhood development, education, etc. We have seen how it has been used to inflict terror upon others.
- It has affected the Church in the USA. Instead of transforming our communities with the principles of the Gospel, we allowed racist public policy to affect the Church. Examples include segregated pews in churches in which Black Catholics would receive the Sacraments of Confession and Communion after all white Catholics had received these sacraments. Black

Catholics who were discerning that God may be calling them to the priesthood or the consecrated religious life could not enter many formation programs. For example, the first Archdiocesan priest of African descent was ordained in 1974. The Archdiocese was established as a diocese in 1789. There were men who wanted to attend the seminary, but they either went to another diocese, a religious order, or pursued another vocation (e.g., marriage).

- Racism is not a thing of the past. [It would be helpful to provide some examples from your experience. Recently, this writer shared with his parishioners about how a small group of people in his first assignment asked the pastor for me to be removed because they did not want a Black priest there. This year, a brother priest in the Archdiocese of Hartford was told by two dying people that they did not want to receive “last rites” from him, but from a white priest. It would be helpful if you know of some experiences in your life. Privacy of others should be respected though. It is not just something people watch on the news and debate whether it is racism.]
- The heart of the matter is that we are brothers and sisters in the human family. God has created us with a diversity of races, ethnicities, and cultures. Everyone has an inherent dignity that no one has the right to infringe upon.
- Anyone who says, “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” can never support and spread racist viewpoints. If they do, then they are lying to God, lying to their brothers and sisters in Christ, and lying to themselves.
- What is needed to get on the path of reconciliation and forgiveness? We must engage in courageous and admittedly uncomfortable conversations. One implication of Peter’s question was how long must continue in the work of reconciliation.
- Some want to put racism in the past, as if it has been eradicated by previous protests, legislation, judicial decisions, and historical breakthroughs. However, we must continue to engage in courageous and uncomfortable conversations.
- Jesus tells Peter that lives that are shaped by His teaching can never right off this topic as hopeless or not necessary. It is something that will have to be worked on. Once again, the perspective is that I am working this out with my brother and sister in the human family.

Matthew 18:35 – “...’So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.’”

- We are aiming at conversion. Not just within our hearts, but in our relationships, communities, and the shaping of policies that affect individuals, families, communities, and our nation.