

A Statement on Current Events from The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus

African American Spiritual

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble! tremble! tremble!

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus is trembling and heart-broken by recent tragic events – in particular, the racially motivated murders of unarmed Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, to name a few -- which again reveal the systemic and normative dehumanization of Black lives in this nation.

Scripture says “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). As men of God -- clergy and religious – we are required to protest injustice and to work for real justice. We therefore condemn White supremacy, police brutality, systemic racism, and vigilante justice as unjust and in fact evil.

As *Black* men of God, we are especially angered by America’s racist narrative of Blacks that – even in 2020 -- leads to disproportionate targeting, incarceration and murder of Blacks, especially males. What U.S. Bishops said in their 1979 *Pastoral Letter on Racism* is still true: “Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church.” While law enforcement may be the more visible gatekeepers of racist societal norms, we see fit to protest the entirety of systemic racism which has infected law enforcers and law makers; politicians and business leaders; church and clerical leaders; educators and entertainers; and the list goes on.

The impact of systemic racism and oppression on our people is destructive – high blood pressure, alcoholism, addictions, broken relationships, unemployment, poverty, mental illness, trauma, and depression. This contributes to the underlying health conditions of Blacks; a vulnerability that COVID-19 tragically exposed to the world. Racism is a sin and all unchecked sin leads to death. Therefore, to revive the soul of our sinful nation, we must exorcise its demons of systemic racism and White supremacy.

That is why, as men of faith, we are called to act. The first action is always prayer. We pray for the souls of those tragically lost, for their grieving families and for their communities. We pray also for the healing of our nation from the suffocating impact of two viruses: COVID-19 and racism. Like COVID-19, those infected by racism can be asymptomatic, contagious and deadly. Treatment for the latter is not social distancing; rather, it's opening our hearts to come together.

Therefore, we pray also for ourselves and our leaders, for the love to see the whole truth and the grace to act with love upon the truth we see. If we cannot act with love, then we should not act at all. But if we are not moved to act, then we do not truly possess love.

As clergy and religious, we serve all of God's people even as Catholic Social Teaching humbles us to act as advocates for the poor and marginalized; to work for real justice; and to heal communities. If the Church does not walk humbly with grieving protestors, who will? When someone says "burn baby burn," who is there to say "love baby love?" Conversely, when well-healed voices sow lies, who is there to encourage this truth spoken by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that "the beauty of America is the right to protest FOR rights?"

In truth, what makes one authentically Catholic or Christian? It is not a narcissistic *image of oneself* with a Bible or Church, as in a photo op; rather, it is one's radical, unconditional love for the *image of God* stamped within all people, no matter their origins or walks of life. It is a living out of Christ's teaching that "whatever you did to the least of my people, you did to me" (Matt 25:40).

For over 50 years, through many toils and prayers, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus has worked to liberate the nation and Church we love from systemic racism and White supremacy (see www.nbccc.cc). For our Church and nation to matter in Black lives today, that work must continue. We remain determined to bring about justice in America. When good people do nothing, evil wins. When good people stand up for truth and justice, America wins.

Yes, God bless America. When will America behave in a way that will justly bless God?