

Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism

People in our day suffer unjustly simply because of the color of their skin or their national origin. Let us acknowledge the sin of racism and work to combat it in our social structures, our institutions, and our hearts.

OPENING PRAYER [condensed from the USCCB Prayer to Address the Sin of Racism¹]

ALL: Lord of all, we pray for healing to address the persistent sin of racism, which is the rejection of the full humanity of some of your children, and the talents and potential you have given them. We pray for the grace to recognize the systems that do not support the dignity of every person, that do not promote respect for those who are seen as other, who bear the legacy of centuries of discrimination, fear, and violence. Give us eyes to see how the past has shaped the complex present.

We pray for social structures in which children of color can grow up without fear, in security and dignity, with access to health care and a quality education that will allow them to develop their gifts.

Empower us to create a new way forward, with a new sense of community that embraces and celebrates the rich diversity of all. Help us to live out your call to combat racism and hatred. Show us how to live in compassionate solidarity, supported by your grace and your love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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FIFTH STATION

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

ALL: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: *They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, . . . to carry his cross. (Mark 15:21)*

Simon of Cyrene did not volunteer to help Jesus. But his very presence meant that Jesus was not totally alone. He had at least one person by his side as he struggled to drag his cross up the hill.

What could be lonelier than facing racism on your own? It is bad enough that some people experience injustices inflicted on them, that they hear insults hurled at them. How much more isolating would it be, if they were led to believe that the whole population shared this hatred.

Although Simon did not have a choice but to help carry Jesus's cross, we do. We can overlook a racist comment, or we can challenge it and explain why. We can keep our distance, or we can reach out to connect with someone who has been pushed to the peripheries of our society. We can stay in our own lanes, or we can work to lift our society to a higher place.

ALL: God, you have arranged the universe so that one person's action can help ease the burden of another. Embolden us to reach out and to speak out, to make others' crosses easier to bear.

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SIXTH STATION

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

ALL: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Leader: *He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, / no beauty to draw us to him. / He was spurned and avoided by men, / . . . and we held him in no esteem.* (Isaiah 53:2b-3)

Crowned with thorns and then struck repeatedly on the head with a reed, covered with blood, sweat, and dust, Jesus's face on that day would have been difficult to behold. Many would have turned away. Yet Veronica pushed forward and offered Jesus her veil to wipe his face. When he returned it to her, the image of his face was miraculously imprinted on the cloth. Veronica's act of love and charity was beautiful, and she is forever remembered for it.

How do you react when you see someone who is suffering unjustly? The human tendency is to avoid eye contact, to walk quickly away. In short, we do not get involved. This allows the injustice to continue.

Yet Veronica did get involved. She saw the suffering of another person and reached out to help – at the risk of drawing attention to herself.

ALL: Jesus, so many of our brothers and sisters suffer daily from the injustice of racism. Give us the gift of courage to be like Veronica and reach out to those whom society has rejected and show them love.

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CLOSING PRAYER

ALL: Loving God, you call us from every race and ethnicity to be one human family. Our nation has fallen far short of that goal. Too many of our brothers and sisters are ignored, ostracized, mistreated, and even killed because of the evil of racism. Too often, our own ways of thinking are infected by the messages of exclusion and marginalization around us.

Transform our hearts, renew our minds, and inspire our actions to effectively address and overcome racism in our day. Help us form new relationships, transform social structures, and reform public policies to establish justice for all. Then all of us will be able to approach you as one people, equal in our dignity, magnificent in our variety, and joyful in our unity, so that this world may be all that you intend it to be. Amen.

Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism: originally written by Tom Faletti. Prepared for St. Peter's Parish, Washington, DC, March 2019, and adapted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 2020.

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³ *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018, p. 5. See www.usccb.org/racism/.

⁴ Self-examination drawn from “The Call to Address Racism in Our Hearts and Communities,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018. See “Bulletin Inserts” on the Parish Resources page at www.usccb.org/racism.

⁵ *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018, p. 28. See www.usccb.org/racism/.