

PEACE AND JUSTICE



open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Article – 4

The following excerpt was taken from: https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf

For a nation to be just, it must be a society that recognizes and respects the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples.¹⁰ These rights precede any society because they flow from the dignity granted to each person as created by God.¹¹ We are reminded of this fundamental truth in the earliest passages of the book of Genesis: Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26-27)

From revelation, we know that the one God who created the human race is Triune, a communion of truth and love, and so by faith we recognize all the more clearly that human beings are, by their very nature, made for communion. Pope Benedict XVI noted, “As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God.”¹² We are meant to love God with our whole being, which then overflows into love for our neighbor. “Whoever loves God must love his brother” (1 Jn 4:21). This is the original meaning of justice, where we are in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of God’s creation. Justice was a gift of grace given to all of humanity. After sin entered the world, however, this sense of justice was overtaken by selfish desires, and we became inclined to sin.¹³ St. Augustine described well our lives after Eden, saying that in the fallen world our relationships with one another have been guided by a “lust to dominate.”¹⁴ Whether recognized or not, the history of the injustices done to so many, because of their race, flows from this “lust to dominate” the other. Even when we are freed from Original Sin by Baptism, we continue to struggle with overcoming temptation and sin in our lives.¹⁵ Although our nation has moved forward in a number of ways against racial discrimination, we have lost ground in others. Despite significant progress in civil law with regard to racism, societal realities indicate a need for further catechesis to facilitate conversion of hearts. Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life. We are not finished with the work. The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very limited formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many, no moment of atonement, no national process of reconciliation and, all too often a neglect of our history. Many of our institutions still harbor, and too many of our laws still sanction, practices that deny justice and equal access to certain groups of people. God demands more from us. We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just.

In Christ,
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