

For Prayer on Racial Justice – Juneteenth

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Racism, not a comfortable topic! These past weeks, we as a country have had to face it head on. For most of us, watching the killing of George Floyd triggered our moral indignation to rise to the surface and again at the killing of Rayshard Brooks. This is not what we want in our name as a people white, black or brown. We saw clearly the “rot” of what racism can do to our communities.

We could not step aside if we care about the vision of the reign of God we heard about in Isaiah in our first reading, where the lion and lamb are side by side with each other. Or, prayed in the Psalm that connects us with the God “who secures justice for the oppressed.”

We have to begin with the words of Paul in First Corinthians that says, “We proclaim the truth openly.” Not easy, since racism and systematic racism is so subtle, our biases are so hidden, especially in ourselves, that we cannot see them. A very deliberate effort with the grace of the Spirit, has to be made to keep looking deep within our hearts to recognize what is behind our judgements, our words, our actions. Then, begin by acknowledging it to ourselves first. We need to *hear* the cries that plead to all of us for recognition of our common humanity and that Black Lives Matter. And we all need to do something about it.

One of my first experiences of having to look deeper, came from an African American friend in my senior year in high school, 59 years ago. Three of us were accepted to enter our IHM congregation. It was wonderful to have two friends also coming to the community. Together we had come to the Motherhouse to visit. A few weeks before our entrance date, Pat, an African American, told me she would not be coming as planned. Deeply disappointed, I asked her why. She responded, “You would not notice this, but there is prejudice there.”

The direction of her life was changed because of it. Yes, I was blind to it and I suspect those who conveyed that message were blind to it, also. Prejudice and biases, passed on from generation to generation, have grown into an “ugly monster” in our country – as described in the words of Sister Tersita Weind, leader of the Notre Dame Sisters.

In our Gospel of the Good Samaritan, we just heard that the Samaritan “dressed the wounds of the man attacked, hoisted him on this own beast and brought him to the inn. The next day he took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper with the request, ‘Look after him and if there is any further expense, I will repay you on my way back.’”

The wound of racism has been a great expense because it has not yet been healed, needs more “payment.” The need to go back, to do more, to return after the Civil War, after Martin Luther King Jr., the Civil Rights Movement, after the ‘67 riots, after the bussing efforts in the early ‘70s, after every effort to bring justice that moved ever so slowly, so little, that it has become a culture of its own, causing fear and distrust of one another.

The blistering wound of racism brought those oppressed by it to a boiling point that has spilled into the streets of our nation to the cities of the world. We cannot afford to keep it hidden in our blind attitudes and behaviors that have bled into the violence of police forces of our country and into the unjust inequalities of every civil system, health care, education, housing. The wound calls us to return again to pour the oil and wine of acknowledging the truth of the seriousness of this issue, heeding the voices of the wounded, working together to take steps to change the systems that continue to rub salt in those wounds and call upon the

Spirit to give us courage and determination guiding our steps to healing our nation and bringing truth and action showing that Black Lives DO Matter.

In a short while, about an hour from now, there will be a march in Monroe and other cities on this Juneteenth day marking the emancipation of African Americans. Even though most of us cannot be present to stand and march with them, let us send our spirit and prayer to unite with their desire for realized emancipation and liberation in this time and in this place.