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## **The scourge of racism**

Bishop John T. Folda

The last few weeks have been difficult ones for our nation, and we have seen some images of hatred and violence that are, quite frankly, shocking. Just last month a rally in Charlottesville, Va. turned violent, and one woman was killed while many others were seriously injured. The motive for the violence was race.

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said: “The abhorrent acts of hatred on display in Charlottesville are an attack on the unity of our nation and therefore summon us all to fervent prayer and peaceful action.”

Racism is, and has always been, a stain on our nation and our society. Horrendous evil has been perpetrated throughout history because of racist philosophies and activities, most infamously in the era of slavery in the U.S. and during the Nazi era in Europe. Some of those evils occurred right here in North Dakota against the native peoples of this region.

We would all like to think that such backward ideas are a thing of the past, but alas, no. The demonstrators in Charlottesville were white supremacists and neo-Nazis. In our own state, too, there are some who openly proclaim racial superiority over others, and tragically, this becomes a thin façade for attitudes and acts of racial hatred. Let us not be deceived either by so-called “pro-white” advocacy, or any other form of nationalism that asserts racial superiority.

At the very least, it sets up an adversarial situation where one racial group is pitted against another, and historically this has been a launch pad for wars and campaigns of violence all around the world. This is not the way of Jesus Christ, who came to save people of all nations. The Church is “catholic,” universal, and encompasses brothers and sisters of every race and nation.

We must be absolutely clear about this: there is no justification anywhere in the Gospel or in Catholic teaching for racism or racially motivated hatred or violence. None. Let no one ever use the Gospel or the Catholic Church as a cover for such ideas, words, or actions. Members of the Church might err in this regard, but hatred or denigration of others is a sin, and racism has no place in the teaching or living of our faith.

Nearly 40 years ago, the bishops of the United States wrote a Pastoral Letter on Racism. Among many other things, they wrote that “Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.” At its most fundamental level, racism is a lie sown by the Evil One, a lie that undermines peace and unity through fear and hatred.

This is a fragile moment in our nation, and we dare not let it pass without notice. Our first response should be an unequivocal rejection of racism in all its forms. For every follower of Jesus Christ, who incarnates God’s love for all people, racism should be unthinkable. There is no place in the Church, and there should be no place in our hearts or in our American society, for racism or for any prejudice that is based on race or nationality. Every person is created in the image and likeness of God, and we are all equal in the dignity we have as children of our loving Father.

As members of the human family, we are bound to one another no matter our race or nation of origin. Our response must also include a rejection of violence. Unfortunately, some counter-demonstrators in Charlottesville also resorted to violence, and the result was predictable. Hatred and violence only beget more hatred and violence.

Our Christian response to racism must always be rooted in prayer. Let us first pray for the victims of violence committed in the name of racism. Let us pray for healing and the restoration of unity in our land of many races. And finally, let us pray for the conversion of hearts – starting with our own – to Christ and his Gospel of love.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia wrote this: “If we want a different kind of country in the future, we need to start today with a conversion in our own hearts, and an insistence on the same in others. That may sound simple. But the history of our nation and its tortured attitudes toward race proves exactly the opposite.”

Rather than working against each other, or trying to divide people, our task should be to unite and to reconcile. Pope Francis challenges us to build bridges with our neighbors, and this person-to-person contact can wipe away the fear that fosters racism.

May we all recognize the dignity of our brothers and sisters, and realize that each person – of any race – is loved by the God who sent his only Son to redeem us. Confronted by the ugliness of racism, the Christian response can only be love. All disciples of Jesus Christ must work to build a civilization of love, founded on the Gospel of mercy. The Church is called in this moment to be a sign and instrument of healing and unity, and each one of us must play our part.