

PulledQuote: The death of George Floyd and the violent acts that followed show us how far wrong we can go when our culture is detached from God and the basic truth of human dignity. – Bishop John Folda

Headline: Racism, violence, and our need for God

A few weeks ago, the people of this nation were appalled to see the brutal death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis. The death of George Floyd was shocking and demands a just response. It also sparked public demonstrations, and questions followed about the ongoing challenge of racism in our nation. It would be an oversimplification to assume that our whole nation is racist; it is not. It is also an oversimplification to assume that all police are racist; they are not. We should not ignore the strides that have been made to overcome racism and the real progress in overcoming prejudice and bias. But like it or not, the sin of racism is still with us, and we still need the healing grace that will allow us to recognize the innate dignity of every human person, regardless of race.

There was a justifiable outcry in response to George Floyd's death, and many people have raised their voices in peaceful protest. But another, darker response in the aftermath of this tragedy has been indiscriminate violence across the country, even in the city of Fargo. People have been killed and wounded, and property has been destroyed. These too are sins that call for justice. Legitimate protest is right and just when an injustice has been done. The founding of our nation was built on protest against injustice, and our civic culture depends on the exercise of this right. But the legitimate protest to this tragic death was exploited and distorted by those with another agenda. George Floyd's memory has been violated by the rampant violence perpetrated in his name, and his own family has disavowed these actions.

It seems that the violence unleashed in the last few weeks is a symptom of a culture that is unhinged from God and from any sense of objective morality. The death of George Floyd and the violent acts that followed show us how far wrong we can go when our culture is detached from God and the basic truth of human dignity. The rage, anarchy, looting, and attacks on innocent human life that we saw in the last few weeks are gross violations of justice and cannot be justified as a response to racism. These actions do nothing to heal racism; they merely inflame it.

Pope Francis expressed well the dilemma and challenge we face: "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time we have to recognize that the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost."

The first step that we as a society and nation must take is prayer. Unless we turn back to God, we will repeat again and again the descent into brutality and senseless violence that we have seen on display from coast to coast. Our founders recognized that democracy cannot survive long without religion and faith in a creator God. So, as people of faith, it is essential that we pray and fast for the peace and well-being of our nation and community. But we aren't praying merely for the sake of material prosperity; we pray for a true peace and harmony built on the Gospel commandment of our Lord: "Love one another as I have loved you." Our prayer is for the emergence of God's Kingdom in our midst.

We must also actively work for a restored sense of human dignity in our culture. Our true well-being will only be attained when the God-given dignity and rights of all are respected and protected, no matter one's race, age, social condition, or religion. Much of the unrest we have seen comes from a justified sense of injustice, and as disciples of Jesus, we are called to pay attention to the real needs of our brothers and sisters. Where human dignity is denigrated and where injustice rears its head, we Christians should do all we can to promote the innate dignity of every person and the justice that is our due.

We must also resist the temptation to brush aside the challenge of racism. God created every living soul on this earth, and he continues to form our human family out of every race under the sun. Some of the greatest disasters in human history have been over racial conflicts, and we should not be naïve about this persistent societal problem. Racism is hatred, and it is sinful. Racism foment violence and destroys peace. We cannot be followers of Jesus if we harbor racism and allow it to fester. Where we

encounter racism, we must do what we can to challenge it and change it. And when we encounter a brother or sister of another race, we must always be sure that we encounter a beloved son or daughter of God.

Taking our cue from St. Francis, let us be instruments of peace and agents of mercy to those around us. Jesus called his followers to be a leaven in society, and we ask for the courage and grace to be his instruments in this difficult time. May all those who have suffered from violence, racism, or injustice be consoled, and may the peace of Christ descend upon our land.