



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

PASTORAL LETTER

June 4, 2020

Before the revelation of God's law, the history of our human race was one of endless violence. In his infinite mercy and compassion beginning with the first revelations of His laws, God has guided us to live a better way. In His covenant with Noah, God forbade murder with the injunction, "Surely I will require an account of your life's blood; from every beast I will require it, and from man; from every man I will require the life of his fellow. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God man was made." Genesis 9:5-7. In the laws revealed through Moses, even criminal executions were softened because the criminal is still in the image of God Dt 21:23. God's providence was calling the Hebrews to a purity in which all nations might find an example and a blessing, as God promised Abraham, "In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen 12:3.

After more than a thousand years of purification, God blessed his people Israel and all the nations of the earth with the birth of his own Son, Jesus the Christ. Revealing the fullness of his Father's law on a mountain, Our Lord said, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not kill; and that whoever shall kill shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment." Jesus commands his followers to avoid sin not only in our actions but also in our minds and hearts. And again he says, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

In ancient times, it was presumed that anyone would prefer his own kind over those of another nation, language, customs, or religion. With the coming of the Christ, St. Paul describes a new reality, "All you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are the offspring of Abraham, heirs according to the promise." Gal 3:27-29. And again, "Strip off the old man with his deeds and put on the new, one that is being renewed unto perfect knowledge according to the image of his Creator. Here there is not Gentile and Jew, circumcised and

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all things and in all." Col 3:11 Thus in the New Testament, racism is condemned as a sin for the first time by the Christian leaders. For 2000 years, Christians have been leaders in the abolition of slavery and racism, as we struggle to "put off the old man" and clothe ourselves in Christ.

The Slavic immigrants who established our Church in America were no strangers to racism and bigotry, and many of our older people have shocking stories of how the Slavs were treated as disposable commodities by the owners of the mines and factories. Our priests' children were denied education at latin rite Catholic schools and their wives denied treatment at Catholic hospitals. Our hearts go out to the family of George Floyd who died in police custody in Minneapolis.

We pray for our country, and ask God for peace and wisdom. We pray for our civil authorities that they may work together in harmony for the public good. We pray for our police and firefighters and emergency medical workers who are risking their lives during this unrest. We pray for the grace of conversion in our own hearts.

In this week of Pentecost, we remember the gift of God's law to our ancestors, and the enlivening of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection of Our Lord. What are we to think in these times of confusion and upheaval? St. Paul has this to say, "for I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us. For the eager longing of creation awaits the revelation of the children of God...For we know that all creation groans and travails in pain until now. And not only it, but we ourselves also who have the first fruits of the Spirit—we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body...But in like manner the Spirit also helps our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings."

St. Peter tells us, "In keeping with His promise, we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, as you anticipate these things, make every effort to be found at peace with Him." 2 Peter 3:13-14 "Maranatha! Come Lord!"
1 Cor 16:22

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