



Cardinal Rigali Center
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MASS FOR RACIAL UNITY HOMILY

By Archbishop Rozanski

March 16, 2022

First of all, I would like to thank each and every one of you for being here this evening, my brother priests and deacons, the men and women religious whom I see here also in such great number, parishioners of our parishes of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, to the people of St. Peters who provide us such welcome this evening to celebrate this Mass, and to all who come here with the specific purpose in mind, knowing that whatever we bring to the Lord in prayer, the Lord hears the cry of His people.

We come here this evening knowing how wounded we are, but the only way to acknowledge our woundedness is by knowing and addressing it, by being able to have resolve to move forward. But doing so makes us uncomfortable because we know we have so much to overcome, so much to do, so much work that lies ahead of us.

In that first reading, we hear the people of Judah, who are plotting against Jeremiah. And what did Jeremiah do? Jeremiah challenged God's people to say, "You can't stay right where you are. The Lord is going to show you punishment if you stay right where you are. You have to move forward."

And what did the people of Judah say? "We don't like his words because he makes us uncomfortable." None of the prophets make people feel comfortable. None. That's why none of the prophets were welcomed. People did not want to hear their words.

But we all know that Jeremiah was persistent. No matter what he suffered, no matter what indignities were heaped upon Jeremiah, he still knew that he was called by God, and he went to preach the word of God, telling God's people of the need for repentance, of amendment of their lives, of changing their direction, because Jeremiah saw with that clarity of vision that God's people were heading for disaster if they didn't change. They were heading for exile. They were heading to be conquered by their enemies. Jeremiah saw all this while God's people were comfortable, so Jeremiah called them to a different level, but in doing so, we know he made them uncomfortable.

Indeed, when I first was appointed here, and many in this church heard me tell this story, I was still in the Diocese of Springfield. After my appointment was announced, one of the priests of Springfield, a very, very astute man, sent me a gift, and the gift was Walter Johnson's book, *The Broken Heart of America*, and he wrote in a little note to me, "Congratulations on being appointed the Archbishop of St. Louis. I think that this book will help you greatly as you begin your ministry there."



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So, I started reading *The Broken Heart of America* even before I arrived in St. Louis, and I thought to myself as I read it how sad this history is, how much of a wound this is upon our nation. And I grew up in the city of Baltimore, and that same book could have been written about Baltimore. It was all over again. As I read that book, I said, "He may have said 'congratulations' in his note, but I think what he put underneath was 'You have a lot of work to do when you get to St. Louis.'" And, indeed, not just myself; we all have a lot of work to do. We all have a lot of work to bring the image of God to St. Louis shining forth in the way that we as brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus seek to live in His image.

We know with racism the image of God is so marred in our world. We think, "What are the origins?" As I was reading over this evening's gospel, I said, "There's one of the origins, our own human frailty," and who pointed it out but the mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John. What did she ask of Jesus? She thought He would come to establish this great earthly kingdom for Israel and that James and John would be sitting one on His right and one on His left. They would be above the others. What mother wouldn't want that for her sons; right? But Jesus took the whole story, and He turned it around and He showed that power was not in being appointed to the proper place or sitting in the right seat, but that power comes from the humility of hearts, to be able to recognize the wounds in our world and to be able to address them and to change. "Sitting at my right or left is not mine to give," says the Lord Jesus, "but can you drink from the cup of which I drink?"

We know that the mother of James and John perhaps did not fully comprehend what she was asking for. She was asking that James and John share not in the great power that she thought was coming, but to share in the humility of Jesus facing His own death and the early church suffering also.

Earlier today, President Zelensky of Ukraine addressed the Congress of the United States, and I can't quote him directly, but I hope I paraphrase him in a well manner. He said that power doesn't come from using weapons against people; power comes from the leadership that leads to peace in the world. That is true power.

Jesus did not bestow political power on James and John, but what He bestows on His disciples and what He bestows on us through the grace of Baptism is that we participate in His ministry. We are called to do His work here in our world, and that is to recognize our woundedness and our brokenness, that is to bring the healing love of God to so many situations, and especially as we gather this evening, we realize that healing power needs to be here as we confront the sin of racism, for what racism does is put one person over another. It's totally against what Jesus has taught us in the gospels. It's totally against the humility with which He calls us to live. Racism does not only mar those who are being prejudiced against; racism mars those who are prejudiced, for without even realizing it, they are moving further and further away from the gospel, from who Jesus calls us to be.



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My brothers and sisters, we come together this evening, each with our own stories, for racism in one way or another affects each one of us. We cannot live in the United States and say that racism has not affected one of us who is in this church this evening for it has. It affects us. For those who have experienced racial prejudice, in knowing what it is not to be recognized for the dignity with which God has endowed each one of us as human beings, and for those who are prejudiced, it does not allow the person to see the marvels that God has wrought in creating each one of us.

Racism is indeed a sin, a sin that is the deepest wound of our country, indeed of our city and our community, for racism flies in the face of the image of God, and that is who each one of us are, made in God's image. It demeans all of us. It takes away our humanity. It does not allow us to truly live the gospel message to which Jesus calls us.

And so tonight we gather, so conscious of our woundedness, of the wounds that have been inflicted by racism, of so many who have given their lives for the just cause of racial equality in our nation. We remember all of them, their witness, their martyrdom, and we ask the Lord that we who gather this evening in prayer may pray for the willingness, the ability, the power to recognize the grace of Jesus in each one of us, and so to be witnesses to overcome racism.

Jesus teaches us in the gospel that the only way to overcome our woundedness is to acknowledge it, then to address it, then to bring it to God and ask God to take care of our woundedness and to bring us healing. We know the deep pain that racism has caused and is causing up to our very day, in our communities, in our homes, in our city, and in our world. We know that woundedness. Let us, therefore, bring that woundedness before the Lord, ask for the healing touch of Jesus and ask God for the grace to truly live that gospel love in being able to reach out to one another knowing that Jesus has made us brothers and sisters in Him, and let us reach out in that love that gives witness to rise above the sin of racism, to show future generations that while we acknowledge the horrible history of the past, we are a people who seek because of God's grace for us to change the present and to change the future.

My brothers and sisters, we cannot do that on our own; we cannot do that by ourselves. We can do that, though, united with one another. We can change this world through a commitment to the love that God gives to us by living that love for others, by opening our hearts to them, by opening our hearts to others, by showing that the love of God so imbues us that the wound that is so deep can be acknowledged and, indeed, will be healed, not because of our own doing, but because of the grace of God.

We have much to overcome, we have much further to go, but we have much that is given to us in the grace of God so that in moving forward, letting His love impel us, we can overcome this great sin of racism, we can overcome this mar on the image of God here in our world and, in doing so, build up that kingdom that Jesus came to bring, not the one that the mother of James and John



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envisioned, but the one that Jesus envisioned, in humility, in love, in service, and in our care for one another.