



# open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

*This is the sixth in a series of articles focused on helping share the important messages contained in this pastoral letter issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

## **Love Goodness: The Urgent Call of Love**

Most people would not consider themselves to be racist. A person might admit to being prejudiced but certainly not racist. As Christians, we know it is our duty to love others. St. Paul reminds us that we live by the Spirit, and the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). We must be honest with ourselves. Each of us should examine our conscience and ask if these fruits are really present in our attitudes about race. Or, rather, do our attitudes reflect mistrust, impatience, anger, distress, discomfort, or rancor?

When we begin to separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons, when we start to see some people as “them” and others as “us,” we fail to love. Yet love is at the heart of the Christian life. When approached and asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39). The command of love requires us to make room for others in our hearts.

The sin of Cain finds its remedy in Christ, in his command to love and in the gift of his Holy Spirit that enables us to respond to his call. When Cain struck and killed his brother, the human family was further divided. But Christ heals all divisions, including those that are at the core of racism. It is through his Cross that we learn the greatest lesson about love. On the Cross, Jesus died for the human race (see 2 Cor 5:15). “He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). Here is our hope! Here is the grace given to us to be healed of this sin of division! Here is the lesson of love.

Once “we have come to the conviction that one died for all”—and not just for ourselves—then “the love of Christ impels us” to see others as our brothers and sisters (2 Cor 5:14). For, “if [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor 12:26). It is the love of Christ that binds together the Church, and this love reaches out beyond the Church to all peoples. This love also requires justice. “If we love others with charity,” as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, “then first of all we are just toward them.” In this way, love “is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace.” In doing so, we are also loving goodness.

Love compels each of us to resist racism courageously. It requires us to reach out generously to the victims of this evil, to assist the conversion needed in those who still harbor racism, and to begin to change policies and structures that allow racism to persist. Overcoming racism is a demand of justice, but because Christian love transcends justice, the end of racism will mean that our community will bear fruit beyond simply the fair treatment of all. After all, “Within [the human] family,” as St. John Paul II said, “each people preserves and expresses its own identity and enriches others with its gifts of culture.”

Excerpt from “Open Wide Our Hearts: the enduring call to love”

A pastoral letter against racism from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops