



In Reaction to the Death of George Floyd and the Aftermath

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“I can’t breathe.” George Floyd’s final words haunt us, horrify us, as he was senselessly suffocated to death.

“I can’t breathe.” What a contrast to these days in Church time, when we are still basking in the light of Pentecost. God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church harkens back to the very beginning, when the Spirit of God moved over the waters at the creation of the world. In Biblical language and mentality, “spirit” is synonymous with “breath.” What a contrast: when we celebrate the infusion of God’s life breath into the Church, a defenseless man has his life breath snuffed out of him.

George Floyd is the latest, and most brazen, example of a pattern of injustices and discrimination against people of color in our country. The violence in response to this act of violence reveals the extent to which the outrage over this has become unbearable. And yet, it does not change the perennial truth that violence begets violence.

The many peaceful protests that have been held properly honor George Floyd’s life and denounce the racism that has become systematic in our society. But we must understand the need for “systemic” change in a broad sense, for structural change alone will only go so far. We need cultural change, a transformation of the cultural mentality – ultimately, a spiritual metanoia. And that change of mind, heart and soul cannot even begin without the admission of sin, personal as well as societal.

“I can’t breathe.” Many people are feeling spiritually suffocated in so many different ways. As Catholics, we are called to walk in the light of Christ and follow the Spirit’s lead, so that God’s life breath might infuse all sectors of our society with justice for the oppressed, compassion for the vulnerable, and reverence for human life in all of its stages and conditions.

I call upon all Catholics, and all people of good-will, to live lives that manifest the spiritual metanoia so needed in our society at this time, and to join together in prayer for an end to racism in all its pernicious manifestations and an end to the deadly violence that is taking place in many cities across the country at this time.

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