

*God of the weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might led us in to the light;
Keep us forever in the path we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;
Shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.*
James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I greet you at the close of a harrowing week in our nation's history. It is a week that has seen protests overwhelmingly peaceful although in many cases turning violent and destructive in a number of America's major cities and across the world. The outpouring of emotion and righteous anger over the death of George Floyd while in police custody has, however, borne some positive results. As of this writing, criminal charges against former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin have been upgraded from third-degree to second-degree murder in Mr. Floyd's death.

At the same time, felony charges have been brought against the other three arresting (former) officers who are or will soon be in custody. The Attorney General's office of the State of Minnesota has promised a thorough and vigorous prosecution of the case, one that seeks justice for the murdered man and his family, and for an aggrieved nation whose citizens in the thousands have taken to the streets in sustained protest.

As encouraging as these developments are, it will take more than prosecutions in a single case alone (or even the prospect of convictions in that case) to begin to heal the deep and historic wounds exposed by this painful chapter. For even after arrests are made and justice is served, even after the streets are empty of protesters and property wantonly destroyed is repaired, even after (it's hoped) legislation is passed and reforms are made addressing racial injustice and societal oppression, and, yes, even after a change in elected government the underlying causes of this traumatic time will remain and will need to be faced.

In other words, it's not a problem that suddenly will vanish with the twenty-four-hour cable news cycle or the political campaign season. While replying to my brother priest The Rev'd Paul Beynon, Rector of St. Mary's Church In Braddock Cornwall who expressed his concern and sends his prayers I put it this way (in something like email shorthand?): Too long a history of injustice too long unaddressed. Great moments of change and progress to be sure; but never a 'digging deeper,' never an honest reckoning with the root causes. In our pride and (willful) blindness always thinking that we've solved it! I've heard a number of you share a similar assessment over these past few weeks.

Still, even in light of this conflict, I do not despair, nor do I lose hope. And nor should you. There are ways both to meet these painful challenges and resources available to us. There's a process for, at least, making a start. Its source of inspiration is the Gospel of Christ, its affirming statement is our Baptismal Covenant, and its model for action is the witness of countless persons of faith throughout our history, who have worked and written, prodded and protested, struggled and sacrificed (some with their lives) in the holy cause of peace, understanding, and love. In short, we are not alone in seeking a new moral awareness or in wanting to build a

stronger and more just society. Persons of good faith and good will have gone before us and are among us now.

One of those available resources, by the way, is actually very close at hand, providing an important first step. It's one that I've had the opportunity to utilize myself, and one that my wife Kim has helped facilitate. Developed and revised by our Diocese over the last several years and taking as its title words inspired by the Baptismal Covenant, it involves a series of seminars called Seeing the Image of God in Each Other. The structure is a simple one. A racially diverse group is invited to gather and through a series of exercises that include story-telling, one-on-one sharing, and 'active listening,' seeks a better understanding of the inequities, prejudices, and very real dangers associated with race and ethnicity in daily life.

On a purely personal note, I found that, as a white male, the most daunting challenge for me during the day-long sessions was also the most beneficial of listening (just listening!), to first-hand testimonies of black seminar members as they spoke (often with great emotion) of their lived experiences. When I stopped hearing my own 'voice' (of self-righteous opinion, thoughtless privilege, and, yes, submerged fear) and started listening to another's honest, compelling voice of hurt and hope, it felt as though a narrow opening to a new world gradually was starting to appear. It felt as though I might, in some small way, finally be 'getting it,' and as a result be of some real use in my ministry to the greater world.

I highly recommend the 'Seeing the Image of God' seminar as an initial means of garnering awareness, and of being able to speak and listen to and actually get to know persons from backgrounds and with experiences (often vastly) different from our own. I will seek to arrange for Transfiguration to host such an event once we can begin allowing larger groups to use our facilities. (I'll also see if there are virtual options to an in-person seminar.)

But I also urge us not to wait for such an event to be offered before we connect with others in our community or workplace or parish and in these encounters begin to hear and harken to their own stories of pain and struggle and loss. I encourage us to read books or join study groups or access programs that chronicle such experiences. I encourage us to listen and learn, to be quiet and attentive in the presence of another's difficult journey. And, since history shows that change CAN arrive through the exercise of legislation and law, I invite each of us to become (or remain) involved in the political process, not only with regard to law enforcement and policing policies, but also to a fair and open and accessible election process.

For the present moment, however, let us take time to mourn the death of George Floyd, and through prayer and deep reflection grieve with his family as they lay him to rest this weekend. Let us remember and mourn the countless other deaths as well, many similar to his, that have not been so publicly exposed. As we seek to make changes in our society and in ourselves, let us mourn the victims of hatred and oppression now and throughout our history, all our precious, unsung brothers and sisters made in God's image, redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, and beloved of the Father who have borne the burden and paid the price for our indifference, our blindness, our cowardice, our coldness of heart. Let us at last find wisdom and courage through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

May all your days be blessed, dear friends; and may you and I BE a blessing to all whom we meet.

In the Love of Jesus,
Fr. Gordon +