

Perspectives on Racism

May 2026 Active Nonviolence Corner



Whoever says he is in the light,
yet hates his brother is in the darkness.
Whoever loves his brother remains in the light,
and there is nothing in him to cause a fall.
Whoever hates his brother is in darkness;
he walks in darkness
and does not know where he is going
because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1 John 2 9-1

Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love

Is it something we say or something we live?

"I was raised in a middle-class, white, traditional family in the 1950s and 60s in Milwaukee. We were a family of four who weren't wealthy but had everything we needed and some things we wanted. While I was the first in my family to graduate from college, the expectation was firmly set that I would go to a university. I recognize that I was given a great deal of privilege just by virtue of being born at this time, in this country, and to this family. But most importantly, I was born with a special privilege because of the color of my skin."

This quote from an Our Lady of Lourdes parishioner describes her upbringing and her "white privilege," which grants white people an unearned advantage solely based on their race. It is an invisible structure that provides better opportunities, including access to schools, jobs, and housing, and it is not a reflection of personal efforts.

Our country, for most of its history, has had a catastrophic problem with racism. Historically, its deep roots go all the way back to how our first settlers colonized the folks already on these lands. The pattern continued with the enslavement of others for the financial gain of a few. This progression and evolution lead to current efforts to whitewash our country's racial history. Today's immigration policy disproportionately targets people with black, brown, and olive skin. Racism is a grave sin that needs courage to confront and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. This month, as we read each vignette,

pause, and then reflect on the content and questions.

- **Can we see parallels between the [Jim Crow Laws](#) (state and local statutes that mandated the legalized systemic discrimination against African Americans) and the current practices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP)?**



The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote a statement in 2018 on racism titled [Open Wide our Hearts](#) addressing the sin of racism in the United States. The message of the pastoral letter was that racism is a direct contradiction to God's command to love one another. The letter focused on the dignity of every person, addressed historical and modern racism, and stated that a change of heart was necessary to lead to changes in our society.

- **Have you heard of it? Have you read it?**



As a school assignment, Emmet O., a 16-year-old Pius XI student wrote a letter to his 11-year-old brother in response to the book, "A Letter to My Son" by Tansai Coates.

"The tragedy of the commons in human geography refers to diversity in commonly used environment and space. Your nation, the United States, is one of the primordial examples of the tragedy of the commons, the tragedy, the loss of the commons: culture and people. I know that is truly one of the hardest pills to swallow, but you may not continue through life living happily with the ignorance of the fact that this nation that you and I call home was built on and thrives on racism."

- **Are we failing to promote equality and nondiscrimination in our schools by denying the full history of our country?**
- **What is our responsibility towards our youth?**
- **Is there a root of racism within me that blurs my vision of who my neighbor is?**



Robert F. Kennedy gave a speech on April 5, 1968, the day after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, "On the Mindless Menace of Violence." Senator Kennedy shared his grief over the loss of Dr. King's prophetic voice and the healing that could have been achieved had his leadership not been cut short.

"For there is another kind of violence, slower but just as deadly destructive as the shot or the bomb in the night. This is the violence of institutions: indifference, inaction, and slow decay. This is the violence that

afflicts the poor, that poisons relations between men because their skin has different colors. This is the slow destruction of a child by hunger, and schools without books and homes without heat in the winter. This is the breaking of a man's spirit by denying him the chance to stand as a father and as a man among other men. And this too afflicts us all. We learn, at the last, to look to our brothers as aliens, men with whom we share a city, but not community."

- **Have I done enough to inform myself about the sin of racism, its roots, and its historical and contemporary manifestations?**
- **Have I opened my heart to see how unequal access to economic opportunity, jobs, housing, and education on the basis of skin color, race, or ethnicity has denied and continues to deny the equal dignity of others?**



Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, 58 years ago. He was a Baptist minister who spent his life advocating for the dignity of all people.

"I think it is one of the greatest tragedies, one of the most shameful tragedies in America, that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most, if not the most, segregated hours in Christian America." He added that "the opportunity of the future is to really go out and to transform American society, and where else is there a better place than in the institution that would serve as the moral guardian of the community."

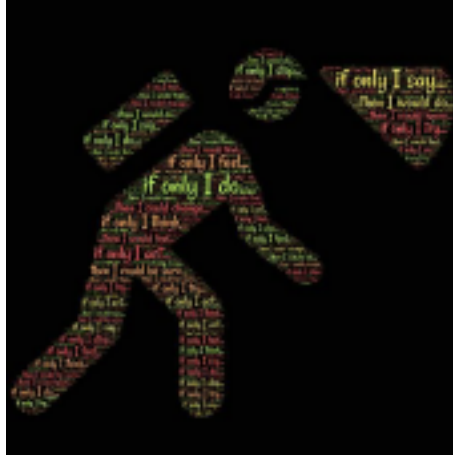
- **Has anything changed in the church since Dr. King's assassination?**
- **What challenges do you see in authentically including people from various backgrounds into the fabric of our local church?**



Patrick Saint-Jean, SJ, is a native of Haiti and a member of the Society of Jesus. He is a prolific writer, an international speaker, and a university professor. In his book, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope*, he wrote:

"We can't really see each other if we are never close to each other. Closeness dispels ignorance and blindness. A common cause can unite us in ways that can reach past our differences."

- **Do I spend my time with people who look like me, who come from the same background as I do?**
- **Do I find ways to spend time with those who seem different?**



We reflect . . .

- What are your thoughts on relationships between individuals of different racial backgrounds?
- How would you respond if you witnessed an act of racism?
- Have you ever taken a stance against a racial stereotype or joke? •

Do you acknowledge the existence of systemic racism?

We read . . .

[Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#) by Isabel Wilkerson

[America's Original Sin](#) by Jim Wallace goes into an in-depth discussion of this problem. [The](#)

[Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope](#) by Patrick Saint-Jean, SJ.

We remember . . . (A final quote from Robert Kennedy's speech)

"But we can perhaps remember, if only for a time, that those who live with us are our brothers, that they share with us the same short moment of life; that they seek, as do we, nothing but the chance to live out their lives in purpose and in happiness, winning what satisfaction and fulfillment they can."

Surely this bond of common faith, this bond of common goal, can begin to teach us something. Surely we can learn, at least, to look at those around us as fellow men, and surely we can begin to work a little harder to bind up the wounds among us and to become in our own hearts brothers and countrymen once again."

We revisit

Easy: Visit the [America's Black Holocaust Museum](#) with someone who has never been there. Take time to read the exhibits and discuss the history of racism in our city.

A Bit More: Search for and [patronize black-owned businesses](#) such as [Tricklebee Cafe](#).

All In: [Project 1619](#) illuminates the legacy of slavery in the contemporary United States and highlights the contributions of Black Americans to every aspect of American society. Spend time on this interactive website, then download the [5 Calls](#) app. Spend a few minutes each day contacting your representatives about legislation that opposes DEI initiatives and other active issues addressing racial inequity.

(Season For Nonviolence 2025: Racism: email 10)

And Together We Pray . . .

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change.

Lord, we know we cannot change what has happened in the past, and the devastating impact of racism.

Grant us the courage to change the things we can.

In the spirit of reconciliation and with gratitude for the gift of diversity, we seek to engage and empower people of faith to create a community of justice and peace through our common prayers and acts of compassion. With your help, Lord, we do have the power to change ourselves and our response to the present situation. Please guide us and give us the courage to do what we must do.

And lastly, Lord, give us wisdom to know the difference,

so that with prophetic courage we may act as advocates for the dignity and well-being of all persons, recognizing that behind every human face is the face of God.