



Dear Clergy, Religious and Laity,

As we anxiously anticipate opening up our churches for the public celebration of Mass and the Sacraments, we must prayerfully reflect on what it means to receive and to be nourished by Jesus in the Eucharist.

Coming back to Mass is not only about a “me and Jesus” thing. Although a personal encounter with Christ is important, it does not end there. As we receive Jesus *at* church, in Word and Sacrament, we then, are not to leave him *in* church as we are dismissed and sent forth *from* church.

Through ongoing conversion, and our response to the grace and mercy we receive at Mass, we are called and *sent* to be Christ, first of all, in our homes. Then, we are to be the *presence* of Christ in our communities. Putting the Gospel of Jesus into action in our everyday lives, in the spirit of the New Evangelization, is the purpose of being fed by the Lord in the Eucharist. As we are empowered by Jesus, we, as the Body of Christ, are challenged to confront the darkness of sin, not only in our personal lives, but within our society.

One of the darkest sins we are confronted with is the sin of **racism**. We, the clergy, religious and the faithful are responsible to take a stand against it in all its manifestations, especially, in the lives of our African American brothers and sisters. Recently, all of us have been shocked by the tragic and brutal death of George Floyd, at the hands of members of law enforcement, we have seen a nation shaken by fear, outrage, anger, violence and destruction.

Besides prayer, and deep soul-searching, what is needed is authentic dialogue and a sincere effort to work in collaboration for peace and justice. It will take all of us, united, to truly address this age-old scourge which robs the person, created in the Image of God, of their human dignity and respect. We need to come up with a *better way* in order to break this cycle of racism. The *present way* is not working. We have allowed a growing “wedge of fear” to be driven between us.

We have an obligation as a faith community to educate and form our consciences to speak up and take a stand against the evil of racism. The U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on racism: “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love” needs to be required reading. I ask all clergy to reflectively read this important pastoral letter and to share it with your parishioners. The USCCB Conference has provided an accompanying study guide which can assist in educating all of us on this serious matter. Please visit the USCCB website for a wealth of resources on this topic of racism.

As faithful Catholics, let us “open wide our hearts.” During this time of pandemic, we have longed for the return to Mass and the opportunity to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. Now, in the midst of this ongoing time of turmoil and challenge, we are confronted with the unresolved problem of racism. This problem raises a question; a question proposed by our Holy Father, Pope Francis: “How can Catholics help lead the fight against racism? To fight racism, Catholics must hunger for justice like we do for the Eucharist.”

My brothers and sisters, it begins with Jesus, and ends with Jesus. In the words of Bishop Robert Barron: “Christianity...takes its power from the person of Jesus Christ. It is Christ - in his uncompromising call of repentance, his unforgettable gestures of healing, his unique and



disturbing praxis of forgiveness, his provocative nonviolence, and especially his movement from godforsaken death to shalom- radiating Resurrection- that moves the believer to change of life and gift of self.”

In the Peace of Christ,

Bishop Myron J. Cotta