

Cardinal Cupich on the sin of racism

By Cardinal Blase J. Cupich

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Over the past few weeks at Mass, we have been reading from the prophet Isaiah. He reminds the people that while they are the chosen race, from the beginning God desired the unity of all peoples. While humanity is divided by culture, heritage and language, God created us to be one human family, one race – the human race.

This reminder of our fundamental unity as a people could not come at a more necessary time, as our nation continues to roil from the violence and hatred displayed by white supremacists in Charlottesville and beyond. Racism is our country's original sin, a wound that forever requires tending. There can be no equivocating. Racism is a sin. White supremacy is a sin. Neo-Nazism is a sin. We know this.

Yet here we are in 2017 mourning the death of Heather Heyer, killed by a vehicle driven into a group of people in Charlottesville protesting hate. Here we are mourning the deaths of two Virginia State Troopers, Berke Bates and Jake Cullen, whose helicopter went down while monitoring the chaos. How many of our young people went to war to fight the ideology of hate we know as Nazism? How many sacrificed and toiled to support the effort to resist that evil? We call them the Greatest Generation. What will this generation be called?

Of course, we find easy excuses to live in tribal ways. Focus on our differences and the aspects we find objectionable or even threatening to our way of life. We exclude the other,

hold fast to the comfort of the familiar. As a result, tensions and divisions arise, hostilities erupt and hatred paralyzes society into hopelessness.

The Gospel texts that have accompanied the Hebrew Scriptures in our worship recently challenge us to search for what we share in common with others. Take, for example, the story of the Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to cure her possessed daughter. The followers of Jesus ask him to discard her, to separate her from them as an alien. She was pagan, after all, and belonged to a tribe known for being superstitious and for their historical hostility to the Jewish people. When Jesus dismisses her request by ignoring her, she persists, repeatedly insisting that Jesus heal her suffering child.

Yet Jesus saw something in her the disciples missed: her great faith and her great love for her daughter. This is clear from her willingness to humiliate herself by making repeated requests of Jesus. She also seems to have a good sense of humor to respond to Jesus' remark about not giving the food of the children to dogs: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the Master's table." Jesus then stuns his disciples and the onlookers by calling her a woman of great faith. I wonder what Peter thought about that, especially after he was chastised for his little faith, failing to trust in Jesus who called him to walk toward him over the stormy waters.

In response to the terrible events in Charlottesville, Google CEO Sundar Pichai sent a letter to his employees in which he decried terrorism in all its forms, including both the white-supremacist march in Virginia and the attacks in Spain for which ISIS claimed responsibility. Terrorists mean to divide us, he wrote. "The challenge and best response is to speak out, to give hatred no place to fester, and to unite around the values we share," he continued. "It's often hard for people to find common ground and to work out the best ways to counter the swelling tide of hatred and terrorism. But history has shown we must try."

When we come across people who are different from ourselves, too often we are tempted to look for those things that validate our fears and our prejudices, convincing ourselves that we are justified in excluding them from our group, our tribe, our family. It has been observed that when mining for gold tons of dirt and rock have to be cleared away to find an ounce of gold. Miners don't go into the mine looking for dirt; they go in to find the gold. The Gospels in these summer weeks provide us with the timely message that instead of looking for the dirt, we should get about the task of looking for the gold in each person, thereby treasuring the differences among us as gifts that enrich us all.

God didn't make us all the same. God made our differences. And it is in those enriching differences that we experience the abiding truth which we must proclaim in word and deed: We are all made in God's image. Believing that has consequences. It means knowing that together we all form one human family. And that we owe each other what all members of the same family deserve: love. Because, as Heather Heyer's mother put it so powerfully just hours after her daughter was killed, "Hate cannot fix the world. Hate only creates more hate."

As bearers of God's image, all of us share in the responsibility of breaking that cycle, and that work must begin now.

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