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RACIAL TENSIONS

## In homilies, clergy highlight divine and human connections



Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

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Fr. Pat Neary



News of racial strife and violence merged with Trinity Sunday June 7. Catholic clergy across western Oregon used homilies and reflections to explore relationships with God and with one another.

“God delights in human diversity,” said Holy Cross Father Pat Neary, pastor of Holy Redeemer Parish in North Portland. Father Neary reminded listeners that all human beings have their origins in God — but also in Africa.

“We have lost sight of the fact that our differences should be celebrated and not lead us apart,” said the priest, who served in East Africa for almost eight years.

Holy Redeemer has one of the most racially diverse Catholic schools in Oregon. Father Neary said he has spoken with black parents who steel their children each day to face discrimination or the need to prove themselves.

At St. Anne Parish in Grants Pass, Father Arjie Garcia said the Trinity exists in perfect unity and love. Humans, created in God’s image, have the same capacity but allow egoism and individualism to cause

have a long way to go, said the young priest.

"If we continue to be like this, we won't reach our end, our desires, and goals as a country," he told listeners. "We need to open ourselves up to the prompting of the Holy Spirit."

At Immaculate Heart Church in North Portland, Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers asked his listeners about the kind of love God wants from us.

"It is a deep, rich abiding love that is sacrificial ... a love that empties us; that brings us out of ourselves."

Deacon Burke-Sivers said that is a very different kind of love than loving a car, a house or pasta.

"Do we take the time to sit down to hear people's stories, to hear people's experiences, to get to know and to love with the love of God?"

He said people need to die to their old way of thinking, to their prejudices. "Die to all the things that separate us from God's love, because that separates us from each other."

Deacon Joseph Piper, of the St. John Society, offered members of St. Mary Parish in Corvallis several ways to respond to the reality of racism.

We must "look honestly inward," said the transitional deacon. "Is there some racism lurking there? Is there some indifference? Then ask God to come and transform the heart."

He encouraged people to pray and to engage, consulting their conscience and speaking with God to determine what engagement looks like.

"If you are going to protest, protest with a heart full of love, and be ready to suffer persecution, to turn the other cheek, and to bring peace wherever you go," Deacon Piper said. "If you are going to remain in your community, find someone different than you and engage with them, listen to them, love them. We live in such a polarized time, and we have to figure out how to love."

At St. Andrew Parish in Northeast Portland, Father Dave Zegar spoke about his work years ago at St. Alexander Parish in Cornelius, where he attempted to improve the strained relationship between the Hispanic community and local police. It was difficult to remove the few individual officers who were acting improperly.

"It is the work of the church to proclaim the Gospel and in so doing to call all people to a change of heart in this broken world," Father Zegar said. "We are also called to act, to make changes to those policies, those practices, those structures that continue to support or promote racism among us."

Jesuit Father Craig Boly, preaching at St. Ignatius Church in Southeast Portland, shared that he felt tribal fears — all the "isms," beginning with racism — were to blame. "Fear keeps me isolated from interacting with other people," he said. "And God says no."

God wants us to "step out of our comfort zone and get to know one another," Father Boly said.

During his weekly Wednesday video chat shortly before Trinity Sunday, Father Tim Mockaitis, pastor at Queen of Peace Parish in Salem, spoke to his flock on racism in the world.

The church opposes racism, said the priest, as the church opposes anything that disrespects the dignity of human life.

"We are united as a diverse and human family," said Father Mockaitis.

"Jesus established this church in order to preach the good news of God's salvation for all humanity across the globe. That is God's great gift to the human race," he continued.

The priest encouraged the faithful to meditate on racist feelings they might hold and pray for the Holy Spirit to root out such stumbling blocks.

In his homily, Missionaries of the Holy Spirit Father Rito Guzman, associate pastor at St. Matthew in Hillsboro, spoke about the divisions in the world.

"God intends in our soul that we may love each other. Therefore, we ought to reject violence, hatred, division and segregation among peoples," he said. "Lately we've been struck with so much hatred and division.

"We're called to do better," added the priest.

"The moment we get to know people, the moment we open our hearts, the moment we allow ourselves to move away from our comfort zone, then miracles happen. Then we realize how precious people are. Then we realize that ... we are all children of the same Father."

— Kristen Hannum, Ed Langlois, Katie Scott, Sarah Wolf

