

CONTEMPLATING AND PRAYING WITH “AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE”

“[A]ntiracism is not an optional aspect of the spiritual life, but rather ... it is essential to becoming all that God calls us to be.”

– Patrick Saint-Jean, SJ, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice*

Prayer as you begin...

O God of Mercy,
we pray that we may be open
to your movement in our hearts,
so that we may hear the stories of others, and be inspired;
so that we may understand others, and walk with them;
and so that, with the help of Christ
who taught us how to love,
we may do our part to make real your Reign.

from Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., *[The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice](#)* (pg. 248)

Questions to contemplate and reflect on as you read...

1. What thoughts and feelings come up for me when I learn about racist behavior of white Catholics towards African Americans in our recent history? What sensations do I notice in my body? Take a few moments to write about your experience.
2. How do you think Jesus would respond today if he witnessed racism? What teachings might he offer? Write down your ideas or share with others.
3. Then ask yourself, what can I do today to respond to racism in a way that aligns with the gospel? Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts, and then share with others.

Excerpted from *[The Inner Work of Racial Justice](#)* by Rhonda V. Magee:

4. Think of a time when you were interacting with someone of another race in the place where you live or work now, a time when the fact of racial difference became apparent to you somehow. *What were some of the thoughts running through your mind? What notions of race do you recall being a part of this experience? What sensations arise in your body as you recall this interaction? What emotions come up for you now?* As best you can, describe these sensations, thoughts, and any accompanying emotions. Then ask: what was underneath these? Dig deeper. After your investigations, let all of these fall away and come back to the sensations of breathing and sitting. Take a few moments to jot down what insights arose for you during this reflective practice (Magee, pg. 135).

5. Looking back on the places I most identify as home, what was the racial makeup of the neighborhoods in which I grew up? How exactly did this community come to be that

way? What laws, public policies, or private policies with racially disparate intentions or outcomes were in place? What were their effects on my predecessors? My parents? On me? How then are the legacies of these structural conditions shaping my life experiences – my opportunities, my challenges – now? And what more do I know or might I learn about my family's journey? How did they come to live where they did? How were they received? Did they experience legal constrictions on becoming full citizens? On receiving a decent education? On experiencing a sense of belonging? What immigration/migration and social policies smoothed or inhibited their journey? In what ways has my own life been affected by this history? What about the lives of people in my circle of friends and family? How has this history framed my own starting point in the journey to where I am now? And, finally, what might I do now to better address the legacies of these practices in my own life? In my own community? (Magee, pg. 199).

Primary Source Note: the following two prayers are adapted from an article Sister Angelica wrote for her Franciscan order's newsletter regarding her decision to march for open housing.

Prayers as you read...

Lord, we are so removed from our Black friends' suffering. Our beds are too soft; our stomachs are too full. We don't hear their call.

When they begin to cry for change, we tell them to be patient – Go back to your unfair living conditions. Be quiet. Then we slip back into our own comfort.

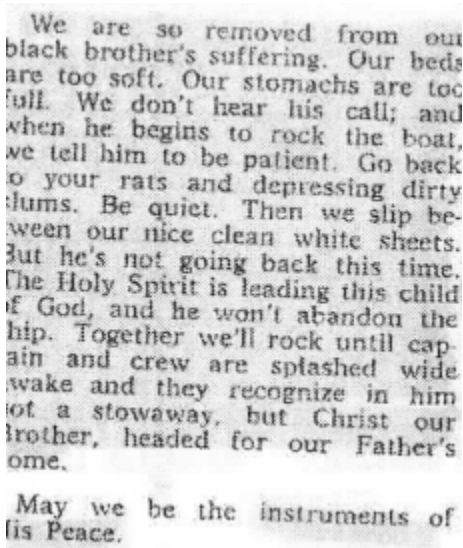
But they're not going back this time.
The Holy Spirit is leading these children of God.
They won't abandon the march toward equality.
We will join hands with them
Showing that we are all one family in Christ,
Headed for our Father's home together.

moment of silence for contemplation ...

from Sister Angelica Schultz (adapted by Judith and Jennifer Daubenmier)

Prayer as you read...

Lord, make me an instrument of social justice:
Where there is racial hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is ignorance, knowledge;
Where there is bias, fairness;
Where there are barriers, opportunity;
Where there are divisions, unity;
Where there is fear, courage;



We are so removed from our black brother's suffering. Our beds are too soft. Our stomachs are too full. We don't hear his call; and when he begins to rock the boat, we tell him to be patient. Go back to your rats and depressing dirty slums. Be quiet. Then we slip between our nice clean white sheets. But he's not going back this time. The Holy Spirit is leading this child of God, and he won't abandon the ship. Together we'll rock until captain and crew are splashed wide awake and they recognize in him not a stowaway, but Christ our brother, headed for our Father's home.

May we be the instruments of His Peace.

moment of silence for contemplation ...

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

rest in silence for contemplation ...

an interpretation of the Prayer of St. Francis (by Judith and Jennifer Daubenmier)

Prayer as you go forth...

We pray for the Spirit's gifts of peace, presence, and guidance for our wounded and divided nation. O Spirit, grant us a peace that is neither acquiescence nor passivity in confrontation with injustice, neither defense of the status quo nor tolerance of the gross inequalities that our nation has institutionalized. Rather, rouse us to respect and embrace our differences as graces rather than insurmountable barriers, as opportunities for life-affirming encounter and engagement rather than as causes for exclusion and segregation. May Your guidance lead us to deeper understanding of the systemic racist violence that ordinary Black and Brown children, women, and men endure each day, even as You free us from the pretense of innocence in order that we might grapple seriously with the white racist supremacy that stifles truth and justice.

Spirit-*ruah*, we pray that you may breathe on us, breathe with us, and breathe through us so that we may turn away from indifference, suspicion, and hostility and turn toward openness, compassion, and solidarity. Spirit-*ruah*, inspire and inflame us with your breath so that we might be authentic disciples of Jesus, so that we might witness God's abiding love in our broken nation, so that we might respond in concrete, practical, active love and solidarity to the terror and oppression the *Pax Americana* has inflicted.

We ask this in Your Name, in the name of the Triune God.

from M. Shawn Copeland, "[Breath & Fire](#)" (originally prepared as a reflection for Pentecost 2020 for Lectio Divina sponsored by the Baltimore Carmel, adapted by Matthew J. Cressler)