

ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS  
CATHOLIC CHARITIES-SOCIAL CONCERNS



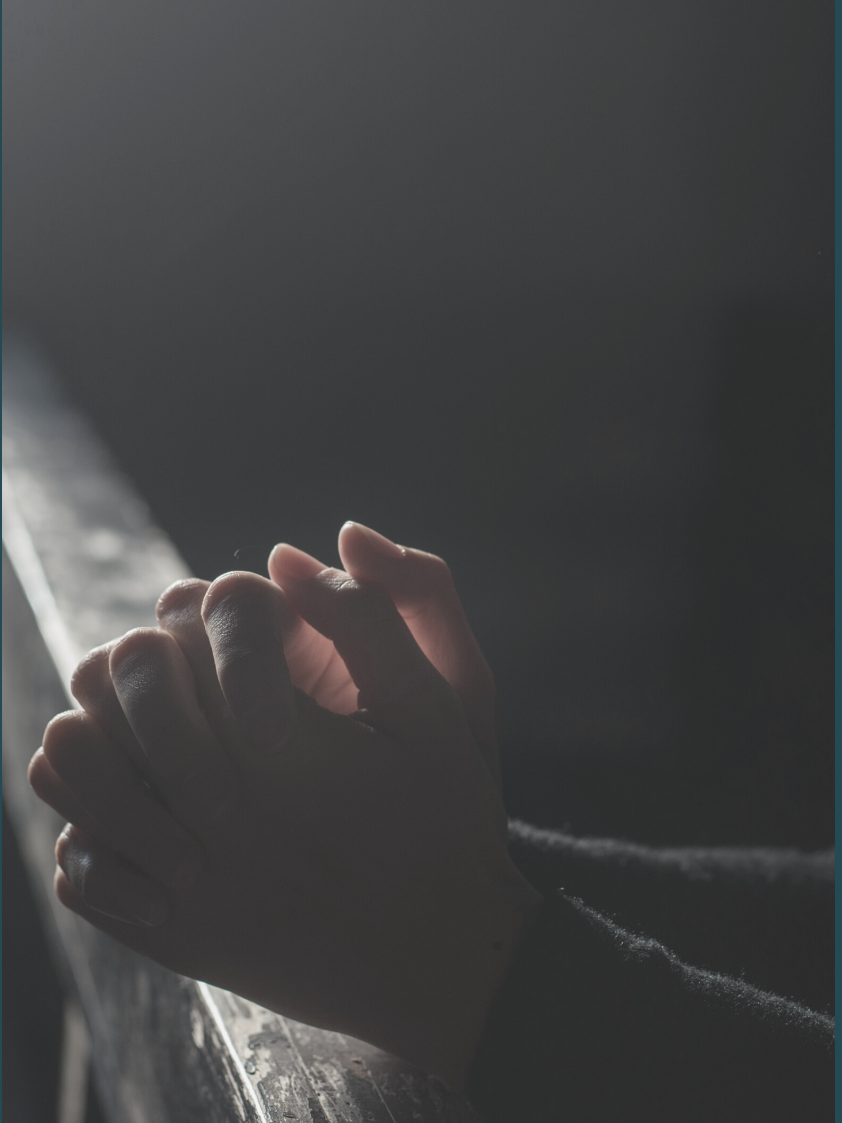
# POVERTY AND RACISM

*31 Day Devotional*

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# Poverty Awareness MONTH



Every January, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, along with other Catholic organizations and lay Catholics, observe Poverty Awareness Month. During this month, we seek to better live in solidarity with those who are poor by keeping them in prayer, and renewing our understanding of poverty in our country.

This year, during Poverty Awareness Month, Catholic Charities- Social Concerns of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis is hoping to bring greater awareness to the recent paper, "Poverty and Racism; Overlapping Threats to the Common Good," a Catholic Charities USA Poverty in America Issue Brief, which was published in its fourth edition on June 25, 2020. We urge Catholics to read this document in its entirety to get a full picture of the intersection between poverty and racism in America today. For our part, this January, we will take a deep dive into this document through the lens of Scripture. We will invite the Lord into our reading of "Poverty and Racism," recognizing that, while we examine the signs of the times with respect to these issues, what we most need is conversion of heart.

Each day of the month, you will be provided with a section of document to "Read," paired with a passage of Scripture on which to "Reflect," after which you will be invited to "Respond" to a prompt about how the Lord is moving in your heart after this reflection. You may wish to journal your thoughts after the "Respond" section each day, or to simply take that section to prayer.

It is our hope that by focusing on the Word of God alongside this Catholic Charities USA paper, we will all become more able to live a life of discipleship in which we become, as Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "a Church which is poor and for the poor."

*Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good*

# PRAYER BEFORE READING

## Catholic Charities USA Prayer for Racial Healing

God of justice,  
In your wisdom you create all people in your image, without exception. Through your goodness, open our eyes to see the dignity, beauty, and worth of every human being. Open our minds to understand that all your children are brothers and sisters in the same human family. Open our hearts to repent of racist attitudes, behaviors, and speech which demean others. Open our ears to hear the cries of those wounded by racial discrimination, and their passionate appeals for change. Strengthen our resolve to make amends for past injustices and to right the wrongs of history. And fill us with courage that we might seek to heal wounds, build bridges, forgive and be forgiven, and establish peace and equality for all in our communities. In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.



# Day 1

## Read

"Any concern with racial justice today must consider the changing demographics of American society and the seismic shift in the composition of our population. We are becoming more racially and culturally diverse than ever before. At least 40% of Americans are Latinx/Hispanic or nonwhite. Many of our nation's urban centers are now so-called "majority-minority," meaning not only that people of color are the majority of the population, but also that no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a numerical majority. Because of immigration patterns and differing birthrates among the various racial groups, it appears likely that by the middle of this century, whites will no longer be the majority race in the United States. Indeed, it is probable that our country will have no single racial majority group. If we are going to create a more just America for all our citizens, we must address some of the current challenges facing our nation. While the majority of poor people in our country currently are white, a disproportionate number of poor people are persons of color. "



## Reflect: Revelation 7: 9-17

"I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice,

'Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.'

All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshipped God, and exclaimed:

'Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'

Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, ' These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

'For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

## Respond:

How is the vision in Revelation similar to the demographics of my country? How is it different? Does this match my experience in my own community or in my parish?

# Day 2

## Read

"The major demographic shifts of the present and near future force us to confront the unfinished business of our nation's struggles for racial justice and inclusion. As one authoritative study notes, "The color question is pervasive in our lives, and it is an explicit tension or at least subtext in countless policy debates." The ghosts of our legacy of racial inequality continue to haunt us. Incidents of racial violence and protests against alleged brutalities; the racial inequities in the nation's criminal justice system; the racial disparities present in health care delivery and access; the continuing controversies over affirmative action; the flood of complaints to government agencies over racial discrimination in employment and promotion; the popularity of "English only" initiatives; the acrimonious debates over immigration policy; and the hate crimes perpetrated against those deemed different provide ample evidence that managing our demographic transition and forging a new American identity will not be easy. We undertake this task burdened by a history of racial injustice, social intolerance, and cultural privilege."



## Reflect: Psalm 15

"LORD, who may abide in your tent?  
Who may dwell on your holy mountain?  
Whoever walks without blame,  
doing what is right,  
speaking truth from the heart;  
Who does not slander with his tongue,  
does no harm to a friend,  
never defames a neighbor;  
Who disdains the wicked,  
but honors those who fear the LORD;  
Who keeps an oath despite the cost,  
lends no money at interest,  
accepts no bribe against the innocent.  
Whoever acts like this  
shall never be shaken."

## Respond:

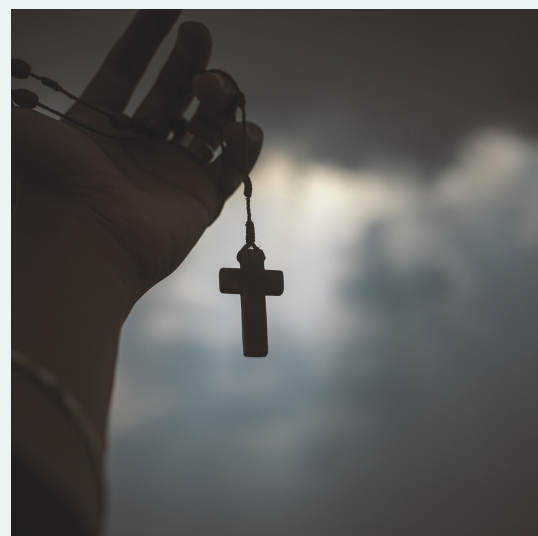
What does this Psalm say to me about how I should see other people who live in America?

# Day 3

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## Read

"As members of Catholic Charities committed to principles of Catholic social teaching, we approach social issues from a faith perspective grounded in a concern for human dignity and full human flourishing. As American Catholic bishops declared in 1958, "The heart of the race question is moral and religious." For us, the existence of racial intolerance, discrimination, and privilege is not only a social injustice; we believe that racism is absolutely irreconcilable with Christian faith and belief. In 2018 the USCCB published a pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. Shortly after publication, the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center developed a Four-Session Process for Faith Communities to promote dialogue and creative action toward undoing racism. Along with this paper, these documents offer ways for all of us to move beyond the status quo."



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## Reflect: 1 John 4: 19-21

"We love because He first loved us If anyone says, " I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

## Respond:

What does this scripture verse mean to me in the context of my reflection on racism?

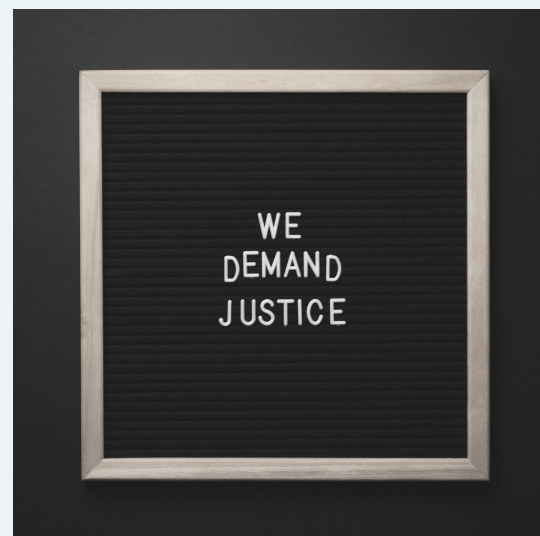
# Day 4

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## Read

As Catholic Christians, we espouse certain fundamental beliefs about God, the human family, and social justice that are directly relevant to the evil of racism.

1) We believe all humanity is created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26). We further believe that God has endowed all men and women with an equal and inviolable dignity, value, and worth. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "Before God, all men and women have the same dignity, whatever their nation, culture, or religion." Our response to this intrinsic human dignity is to recognize, promote, and defend it from all forms of attack and to create the social conditions in which all human persons may flourish. Racism fractures the unity of the human family, violates the human rights of individuals and groups, mocks the God-given equal dignity of human beings, and thus is incompatible with authentic faith in God. As Pope Francis cautions us, "To raise doubts about the working of the Spirit, to give the impression that it cannot take place in those who are not 'part of our group,' who are not 'like us,' is a dangerous temptation. Not only does it block conversion to faith, it is a perversion of faith."



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## Reflect: Genesis 1:26-27

"Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

God created mankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them."

## Respond:

What does God look like to me? In whom is it easy for me to see his image?  
In whom is it difficult?

# Day 5

## Read

2) We believe that the diversity of the human family is a divine blessing and mirrors the inner life of God. In the story of Pentecost, we read how the various peoples of the earth were able to hear God's word proclaimed "each in their own language" (Acts 2:11). The Holy Spirit's descent upon the church did not cancel or annul differences of race, language, or culture. Instead the Spirit's presence caused these differences not to be an obstacle to the unity of the human family. The Spirit enriches humanity and the church with a variety of gifts. Indeed, because the church is "catholic"—that is, inclusive and universal—the diversity of peoples, languages, cultures, and colors among us must not only be tolerated, but also cherished and celebrated.



## Reflect: Acts 2:1-11

"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which patted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, 'Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? we are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God'. They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, 'What does this mean?'"

## Respond:

The Church is shown to be from many different nations, ethnicities and languages on Pentecost. However, in many parishes today it is much more homogenous racially, ethnically, socio-economically etc. Do I think of the "Church" as just looking like my own parish, or do I recognize that the Catholic Church is world- wide, composed of people from all kinds of backgrounds and inclusive of all kinds of people?

# Day 6

## Read

3) We believe in the solidarity of the human family, which leads to the conviction that we are responsible for each other's welfare. The human family is bound together by that social form of charity that is called solidarity. This solidarity moves us to have a concern for those who are different from us and to see them as full sharers in our humanity – indeed, as neighbors and friends. As Pope John Paul II taught, "Solidarity helps us to see the 'other' – whether a person, people, or nation – not just as some kind of instrument...but as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper' (cf. Gn. 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God."



## Reflect: Luke 10: 29-37

"But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half- dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day, he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction. 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back. ' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?' He answered, 'The one who treated him with mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.' "

## Respond:

What does solidarity mean to me? Who is my neighbor?  
How do I act as a neighbor to others?

# Day 7

## Read

4) Finally, we believe that those who are poor and marginalized have a privileged claim upon the consciences of believers and the public concern of the state. Often called a "preferential option or concern for the poor," Pope John Paul described this as "a call to have a special openness with the small and the weak, those that suffer and weep, those that are humiliated and left on the margin of society, so as to help them win their dignity as human persons and children of God." As the U.S. bishops observed in their pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, "What is needed and what we are calling for is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change and the reform of our institutions and society." Because racism both exacerbates the poverty of those who are poor and results in economic disadvantage even for those who are not, a faith-inspired preferential concern for the poor and socially vulnerable demands a proactive struggle against the social evil of racism. This requires each of us to be open to the arduous ongoing conversion of heart.



## Reflect: Luke 4: 16-21

"He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.' Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, 'Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.'"

## Respond:

How do I live my baptismal call to take Jesus' mission as my own to 'bring glad tidings to the poor,' and 'let the oppressed go free?'

# Day 8

## Read

The core of our conviction is well-expressed by the U.S. Bishops when they proclaim, "Racism is not just one sin among many; it is a radical evil which divides the human family." Acknowledging this sad legacy of racial complicity is painful. Yet, we cannot ask the wider society to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves. Our faith leaders teach, "History can be healing if we will face up to its lessons." May this history serve as an impetus for renewed determination to remedy perpetrated harms and to not repeat our failures – tasks we undertake with the help of God.



## Reflect: Psalm 32: 1-7

"Blessed is the one whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no deceit. Because I kept silent, my bones wasted away; I groaned all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength withered as in dry summer heat. Then I declared my sin to you; my guilt I did not hide. I said, 'I confess my transgression to the Lord,' and you took away the guilt of my sin. Therefore every loyal person should pray to you in time of distress. Though flood waters threaten, they will never reach him. You are my shelter; you guard me from distress; with joyful shouts of deliverance you surround me."

## Respond:

Can I look at my nation's history in a new light and see how sins can be brought before the Lord to be healed and forgiven?

# Day 9

## Read

What is Racism? Part of what makes racism such a difficult issue to address in our nation's public discourse is that most Americans lack an adequate understanding of how persistent and destructive this evil continues to be in our society. We know that racism is a not simply a matter of the past, conveyed on the grainy images of black and white films. No one disputes that acts of blatant insensitivity still stain our social fabric. Most grant that occasional acts of callous bigotry still occur. But Americans tend to believe that these are isolated incidents and tragic exceptions to the climate of racial decency which now prevails among the majority of Americans in general, and white Americans in particular. At best, this thinking is naïve. At worst, it is a delusion and an evasion of reality. Recent events serve to underscore this disturbing reality.



## Reflect: Isaiah 26: 12, 16-19

Lord, you will decree peace for us, for you have accomplished all we have done.

Lord, oppressed by your punishment, we cried out in anguish under your discipline.

As a woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in pain, so were we before you, Lord.

We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth only to wind; Salvation we have not achieved for the earth, no inhabitants for the world were born.

But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise! Awake and sing, you who lie in the dust!

For your dew is a dew of light and you cause the land of shades to give birth."

## Respond:

Do I see racism as a matter of the past or the present? How about the future? What does the Lord hope for my society to look like?

# Day 10

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## Read

We believe that despite the undeniable changes in racism's manifestations, we still are a "racialized society," that is, "a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships." We are a nation "that allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed." At its core, racism is a system of racially conferred – and denied – privilege, advantage, benefits, and status. This inequality of status and benefit endures today. Thus, "racism today remains what it has always been: a defense of racial privilege."



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## Reflect 1: Corinthians 12: 12-26

"As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,' it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,' it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' Indeed the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it: if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

## Respond:

Do I suffer with those who suffer due to racial injustice in my community?

# Day 11

## Read

Racism entails more than conscious ill-will, more than deliberate acts of avoidance, exclusion, malice, and violence perpetrated by individuals. We acknowledge that members of any racial group can act unjustly toward those they consider racially “different.” But such individual acts cannot alter the fact that in the United States, one racial group is socially advantaged, and the others endure social stigma. Racism describes the reality of unearned advantage, conferred dominance, and invisible privilege enjoyed by white Americans to the detriment, burden, and disadvantage of people of color. This network of racially conferred advantages and benefits has been termed “white privilege.” White privilege refers to the reality that in U.S. society “there are opportunities which are afforded whites that people of color simply do not share.” These advantages range from greater ease in hailing a taxi and moving into whatever neighborhood they can afford, to easier access to positions of social influence and political power, to the presumption that their race will not work against them when seeking employment and in other social situations. Being racially advantaged might be unwanted or undesired by individual white Americans. In fact, some white Americans are distressed when they become aware of the reality of their privilege. Regardless of an individual’s desires, an “invisible package of unearned assets” is enjoyed by white people because of the racial consciousness which is subtly pervasive in our social customs and institutions.



## Reflect: Psalm 25:8-15

"Good and upright is the Lord,  
therefore he shows sinners the way,  
He guides the humble in righteousness,  
and teaches the humble his way.  
All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth  
toward those who honor his covenant and decrees,  
For the sake of your name, Lord,  
pardon my guilt, though it is great.  
Who is the one who fears the Lord?  
God shows him the way he should choose.  
He will abide in prosperity,  
and his descendants will inherit the land.  
The counsel of the Lord belongs to those who fear him;  
and his covenant instructs them.  
My eyes are ever upon the Lord, who frees my feet from the  
snare."

## Respond:

How can the virtue of humility help me to acknowledge my experience of racism or racial privilege?

# Day 12

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## Read

White privilege may be an uncomfortable concept for many of us. Most of us are not trained to see how racism disadvantages or burdens people of color. We are not so accustomed to see how racism results in unfair advantages or benefits for the dominant racial group. White privilege shifts the focus from how people of color are harmed by racism to how white Americans derive advantages because of it. It is the flip-side and inescapable corollary of racial injustice. Racial injustice comes about to preserve and protect white privilege.



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## Reflect: 2 Chronicles 19: 4-7

"Jehoshaphat dwelt in Jerusalem; but he went out again among the people from Beer-sheba to the highlands of Ephraim and brought them back to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. He appointed judges in the land, in all the fortified cities of Judah, city of city, and he said to them: when it comes to judgment God will be with you. And now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Act carefully, for with the Lord, our God, there is no injustice, no partiality, no bribe-taking."

## Respond:

Do I notice "partiality" or "privilege" in my own life? Can I ask the Lord to reveal to me areas that might make me uncomfortable so that I can even more live a life of true justice?

# Day 13

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## Read

White privilege results when pervasive beliefs about the inadequacies of people of color become expressed by or entrenched in our society's institutional policies, social customs, cultural media, and political processes. Thus, there arises a mutually reinforcing relationship between personal prejudicial beliefs and common social practices. Such racial privilege often goes undetected because it has become internalized and integrated as part of one's outlook on the world by custom, habit, and tradition. It can be seen in most of our institutions: judicial and political systems, law enforcement, social clubs, associations, hospitals, universities, labor unions, small and large business, major corporations, the professions, sports teams, and the arts. This insight leads to two further observations. First, racial privilege operates in ways that are often outside of conscious awareness. Second, racial privilege is not "natural." It is a human creation.



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## Reflect: Deuteronomy 5: 6-10

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or serve them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, bringing punishment for their parents' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation, but showing love down to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

## Respond:

What are the similarities and differences between how prejudices are passed down through the generations and how the book of Deuteronomy talks about the effects of sin through the generations?

# Day 14

## Read

For the most part, white Americans do not think of themselves as “white” or as belonging to a “white culture.” When asked what their racial or cultural identity is, many whites state an ethnic background (e.g., a hybrid of German/Irish) but then relate that this ethnic background is not a significant part of their personal identity. Most whites describe themselves as “American” – which is significant because if “American” is their specific cultural identity, what does that make Americans of color? Very few spontaneously describe themselves as “white.” This means that white Americans are often oblivious to their privilege and how deeply embedded racial advantage is in our nation unless those who are “other” challenge their understanding of reality.



## Reflect: Mark 8: 27-30

"Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him."

## Respond:

How do I describe myself? What is my identity? Who does Jesus say that I am?

# Day 15

## Read

"Many white Americans and Americans of color as well are unaware of how deeply affected we are by racial framing and cultural conditioning. Many are conditioned to not see white privilege and have been socialized to see racial advantage and benefit as "normal" and just the way things are. By acknowledging this, we are not asserting that every white person is a racist; rather, we are acknowledging the existence of a centuries-old system of cultural and institutional advantages that is based on the implicit or explicit belief that one race is superior to another. Nor are we saying that every white American has benefitted equally from white privilege. We are saying that every person of color has been harmed by white privilege and the adverse socio-economic conditions it creates for persons of color. "



## Reflect: 2 Corinthians 13: 5-9

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?- unless, of course, you fail the test. I hope you will discover that we have not failed. But we pray to God that you may not do evil, not that we may appear to have passed the test but that you may do what is right, even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement."

## Respond:

I ask the Lord to help me to examine myself and my life to see how I have been affected by "racial framing and cultural conditioning".

# Day 16

## Read

"Racism, then, is much more complex than the typical understanding acknowledges. It is far more than deliberate acts of exclusion, bias, and bigotry. Racism is a way of understanding and interpreting skin color differences so that white Americans enjoy a privileged social status with access to advantages and benefits to the detriment, disadvantage, and burden of persons of color. Racism, in all forms and permutations, is at its core a defense of racially-based social privilege."



## Reflect: Lamentations 2:13b-14

"What example can I give in order to comfort you, virgin daughter Zion?

For your breach is vast as the sea;  
who could heal you?

Your prophets provided you visions of whitewashed illusion;

They did not lay bare your guilt,  
in order to restore your fortunes;

They saw for you only oracles  
of empty deceit."

## Respond:

How am I called to lament with the author of Lamentations today?  
Where do I find hope in the Lord?

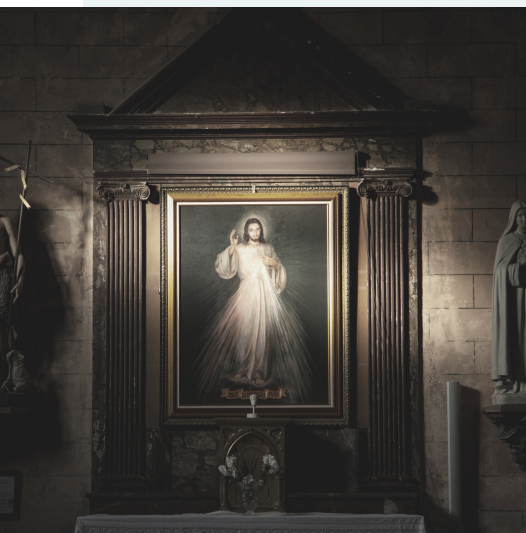
# Day 17

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## Read

### The Legacy of the Past in the Present: The Contemporary Reality of Racial Disparity

The dynamics of the past are directly relevant to understanding the disproportionate impact of poverty upon groups of color today. We live with the legacy of past decisions and social policies that have created a transgenerational burden of severely circumscribed economic opportunity. The past gives us the context for understanding the severe wealth disparity between racial groups, which we noted at the beginning of this paper. For most Americans, their greatest asset is their home. Home ownership provides one of the chief means of wealth generation; it provides the means for accessing opportunities such as collateral for buying a business or obtaining loans for higher education; it is one of the principal sources of financial stability in case of an economic emergency; and it is a means by which wealth is accumulated and passed on to one's heirs. Thus, the historic exclusion of African Americans and other groups from the benefits of home ownership creates an economic deficit and reduced access to social mobility that persists even today. Whites as a social group have the present advantage of decades of accumulated wealth and the opportunities it provides.



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## Reflect: Luke 12: 16-21

"Then he told them a parable , 'There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?' And he said, 'This is what I shall do; I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, 'Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!' But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasures for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.'"

## Respond:

How can I become rich in what matters to God?

# Day 18

## Read

### Residential Segregation and the Concentration of Poverty

The importance of housing for financial stability makes even more troubling the current residential segregation of our country. Perhaps the most stubborn and persistent manifestation of racism is the highly segregated housing patterns found in the United States. An authoritative recent study of race relations in our nation observes, "Housing is probably one of those areas in which the persistence of White prejudice and discrimination is still most alive." Stable racially integrated neighborhoods are rare in our country. Many of our metropolitan areas are even considered "hyper segregated." The term, "spatial racism," has been coined to describe this severe residential segregation. The result is that white persons and people of color are geographically separated, and increasingly isolated, from one another: "Spatial racism creates a visible chasm between the rich and the poor, and between whites and people of color." Because cities are increasingly viewed as Black or brown enclaves, discussions of urban life have taken on racial overtones. Given the importance of residence for determining one's access to quality education, health care, employment opportunities, and informal social networking, it comes as little surprise that residential segregation greatly contributes to the disparities between black and brown people and white people in educational achievement, quality of health care, and acquisition of wealth. "The more segregated or isolated a neighborhood, the less likely it is that the residents will have easy access to information concerning schools, apprenticeship programs, the labor market, financial markets, and so on."



## Reflect: Acts 2: 42-47

"They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

## Respond:

What is my community like? Does it reflect how the early Christians lived? What in my life can I rearrange to be more in line with these early Christians?

# Day 19

## Read

### Employment Discrimination

News accounts of alleged racial discrimination in the nation's workplaces are still quite common. Despite measurable progress during the last 20 years, people of color still must negotiate subtle obstacles and overcome both overt and covert barriers in their pursuit of employment and/or promotion. Studies document that although racial minorities now experience greater ease in being hired for entry-level positions than in the past, they are often stymied when it comes to being promoted to positions of significant influence and responsibility. According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, even after three decades of affirmative action, a severe racial disparity continues to exist in the top ranks of corporate leadership. For example, white males – a minority of the nation's workforce – hold more than 90 percent of corporate senior management positions. This commission further notes that the "fears and prejudices" of white middle managers are most responsible for this continued racial disparity.



## Reflect: James 2: 1-4

"My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Sit here, please,' while you say to the poor one, 'Stand there,' or 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs?"

## Respond:

Do I notice myself or others around me "showing partiality" to certain people or making distinctions based on superficialities?

# Day 20

## Read

### Controversies over Immigration

For over 100 years, our agencies have worked with immigrants who come to our nation in search of economic opportunity. Our daily work gives us firsthand experience of how racism and poverty impact many members of the new immigrant groups among us. Children in immigrant families suffer higher poverty rates, endure more housing and food problems, and receive public benefits at lower rates than children in native families. We are also concerned that anxieties about border security focus primarily on the border shared with Mexico, and not the one with Canada. This leads us to suspect that such discussions have a racial subtext, fueled by an anxiety over the number of darker-skinned immigrants in our country.



## Reflect: Matthew 2:13-15

"When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.' Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"

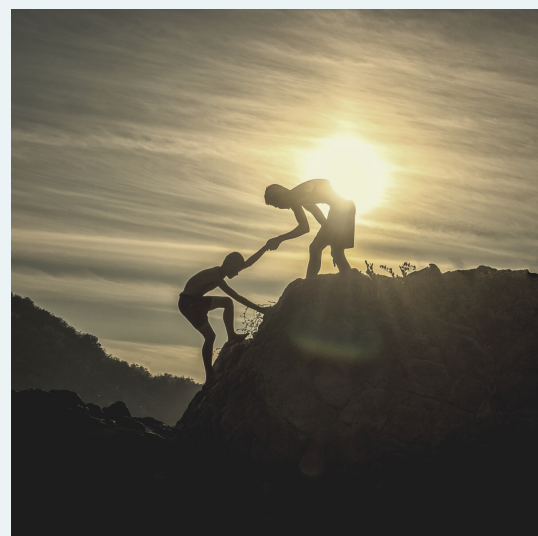
## Respond:

Can I see the image of the Holy Family reflected in people who are migrants and refugees?

# Day 21

## Read

A Call to Action: Confronting Racism to Eliminate the Threat of Poverty. Racism is not natural. Racial privilege does not just happen. It is important to stress the human agency behind racial advantage for two reasons. First, human agency makes white privilege an ethical reality for which there is moral responsibility and accountability. Second, because human agents created and maintain racial injustice, human agency can also challenge, modify, and dismantle it. This is the basis for our call to action. We continue to support policy proposals that decrease poverty. These center on creating more livable-wage jobs, raising the wages of existing low-paid jobs, and investing our common wealth in social welfare policies for low-income families and individuals. The next few days we will focus on those additional measures needed to address the poverty which is racially caused or aggravated.



## Reflect: Luke 9: 12-17

"As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, 'Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here.' He said to them, 'Give them some food yourselves.' They replied, 'Five loaves and two fish are all we have, unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people.' Now the men there numbered about five thousand. Then he said to his disciples, 'Have them sit down in groups of about fifty.' They did so and made them all sit down. Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets."

## Respond:

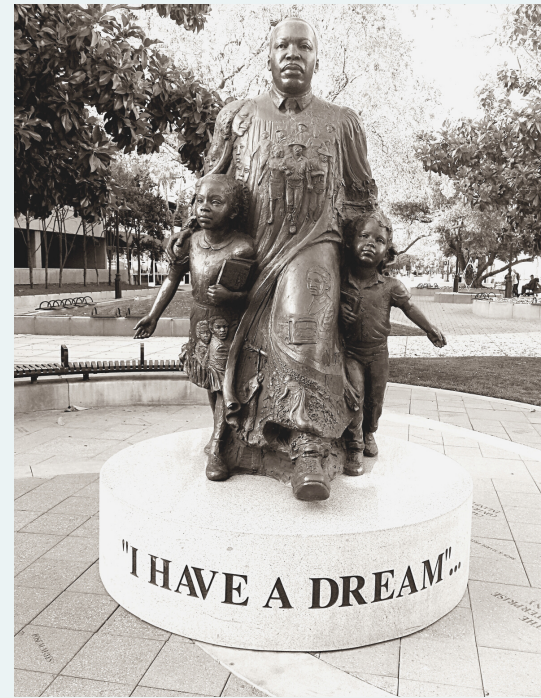
How am I called to use my "human agency" to "challenge, modify, and dismantle" racial injustice? Can I hear the Lord say to me, "Give them some food yourselves?" What is my personal responsibility?

# Day 22

## Read

### Public Policy Proposals A Renewed Commitment to Racial Equity as a National Goal and Priority

Martin Luther King, Jr., lamented that during his life most white Americans were not sincerely committed to genuine equity but to mere “improvement.” He observed a fundamental ambivalence whereby the white majority wants to condemn blatant acts of injustice, and yet preserve their position of social dominance. He concluded that the majority of the dominant culture is suspended between two opposing attitudes: “They are uneasy with injustice, but unwilling yet to pay a significant price to eradicate it.” King’s insights resonate with our own conviction that what is hailed as “racial progress” is too often a covering over and not a fundamental change in race relations. Our reflection leads us to conclude that our national commitment to racial equity has been halfhearted, at best. Thus, we call for a new commitment to the project of genuine racial equality. We believe that the proposals we advocate below will contribute to this goal. Yet, until the reality of white privilege is forthrightly acknowledged and addressed, genuine racial equity will be unattainable. Therefore, we call upon scholars, activists, theologians, and pastors to help all Americans to deepen our understanding of white privilege and the ethical challenges it poses for a nation struggling to commit itself to genuine racial equality.



## Reflect: Luke 6: 24-26

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.  
But woe to you who are filled now,  
for you will be hungry.  
Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will grieve and weep.  
Woe to you when all speak well of you,  
for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

## Respond:

I don't often hear this part of the Beatitudes. How do they sit with me in light of the paragraph about racial equity?

# Day 23

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## Read

### Improved Fair Housing Laws

As noted yesterday, segregated housing remains one of the most stubborn and persistent manifestations of racism. Racially segregated neighborhoods too often suffer social abandonment, creating inferior housing stock that severely curtails economic advancement. Yet the cause of fair housing seems to have drifted off the national radar and is no longer a pressing priority. We strongly advocate the stricter enforcement of fair housing laws and for more adequate funding of those agencies charged with administering, monitoring, and enforcing existing laws against racial discrimination in obtaining the residence of one's choice. We advocate greater accountability and transparency in the mortgage industry (e.g. Community Reinvestment Act) and more effective oversight of lending agencies to ensure equal access to the funding necessary to obtain housing financing.



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## Reflect: Proverbs 3:27-35

""Do not withhold any goods from the owner when it is in your power to act. Say not to your neighbor, 'Go, come back tomorrow, and I will give it to you,' when all the while you have it. Do not plot evil against your neighbors, when they live at peace with you. Do not content with someone without cause, with one who has done you no harm. Do not envy the violent and choose none of their ways. To the Lord the devious are an abomination, but the upright are close to him. The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but the dwelling of the just he blesses; Those who scoff, he scoffs at, but the lowly he favors. The wise will possess glory, but fools will bear shame."

## *Respond:*

What is the Lord saying to me today about racism and housing?  
What do I want to ask God about?

# Day 24

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## Read

### Increased Federal Funding for Affordable Housing

Given the historic exclusion of communities of color from the opportunities to accumulate financial assets, many find themselves at a disadvantage when seeking competitive rates for financing a home. We therefore advocate for increased federal support in building more affordable housing, especially through full funding of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and its related programs, and expanding other opportunities for people of color to purchase their own homes. At the least, the government should provide opportunities for communities of color to enjoy the same benefits provided to white Americans during the 1940s and 1950s. Basic fairness demands that just as these groups were actively excluded from federal mortgage guarantees in the past, they now deserve to be intentionally included today.



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## Reflect: Philippians 2: 1-5

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus."

## Respond:

How do I regard others as more important than myself? Do I look out for the best interests of others in my parish, my city, my nation? I ask for help to have the attitude of Christ.

# Day 25

## Read

### Stronger Laws to Punish Predatory Lenders

Numerous studies detail how central city neighborhoods suffer from a dearth of financial and banking services compared to suburban communities. This void has been filled by institutions offering financial services to the poor, charging exorbitant interest rates for pay day loans and short-term rentals of consumer goods. This results in a spiral of debt that creates further economic disadvantage for low-income people. We therefore call for stronger laws to punish predatory lenders, cap the interest that can be charged for short-term loans, and require greater transparency of the conditions of such loans in a language that is accessible for those who might have limited education or English proficiency.

### "Digital Inclusion" and Access to Technology

The fact of the "digital divide," that is, the gap in information technology access between racial groups and economic classes, is the subject of recent public discussion. What often goes unnoted, however, are the economic consequences of this "digital exclusion" in an information economy. Research suggests that "people with access to the Internet have better access to life opportunities such as living wage jobs." We therefore advocate increased measures that provide low-cost or free Internet access to impoverished communities of color.



## Reflect: Leviticus 25: 35-38

"When one of your kindred is reduced to poverty and become indebted to you, you shall support that person like a resident alien; let your kindred live with you. Do not exact interest in advance or accrued interest, but out of fear of God let your kindred live with you. Do not give your money at interest or your food at a profit. I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God."

## Respond:

What does Scripture say about interest?  
Do I share this view? Why or why not?

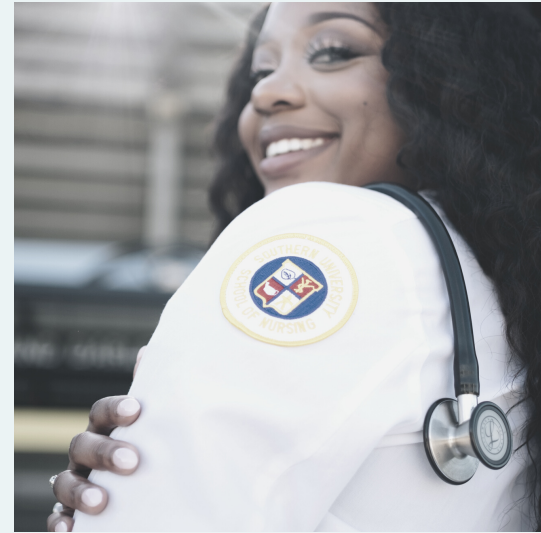
# Day 26

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## Read

### Progressive Affirmative Action Policies in Education and Employment

The active exclusion of groups of color from educational and employment opportunities in the past creates an obligation to alleviate the resulting inequities of the present. Moreover, we have noted that ample evidence exists that racial discrimination in education and employment has not disappeared. Despite the views of many in our nation, we believe that the need for affirmative action in employment and education is still urgent. There is no single type of affirmative action program. "Affirmative action" is an umbrella term given to a variety of practices that seek to address and rectify the pervasive discrimination and social stigma suffered by people of color and women. Such practices include aggressive recruitment and targeted advertising campaigns; remedial education and job training programs; vigilant enforcement of nondiscrimination laws; and flexible hiring goals, recruitment targets, and promotion timetables.



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## Reflect: Isaiah 1: 16-18

"Wash yourselves clean!

Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes;  
cease doing evil;

learn to do good.

Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's  
plea, defend the widow.

Come now, let us set things right,  
says the Lord:

Though your sins be like scarlet,  
they may become white as snow;  
Though they be red like crimson,  
they may become white as wool."

## *Respond:*

How can "affirmative action" practices help to "redress the wronged" and "set things right"? What does the Lord ask me to do in my own life to participate in "making justice my aim?"

# Day 27

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## Read

### Quality Educational Opportunity for Poor and Disadvantaged People

As we have noted, economic advancement is linked to educational opportunity. Yet, too often the quality of one's education is dependent upon where one has the fortune (or misfortune) of living. The poor state of public education in many of our nation's cities is a complex phenomenon with multiple contributing causes. Regardless, it is a scandal that children of color endure school environments and a lack of resources that would never be tolerated for white children. We call for more adequate measures that will equalize the funding of public education across metropolitan areas, so as to enhance quality public instruction for all those who will be entrusted with our nation's future.



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## Reflect: Mark 10: 13-16

"And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.'"

## Respond:

When I imagine Jesus welcoming the children, what do they look like? What would it be like for the children in my community to all be welcomed as Christ welcomes them?

# Day 28

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## Read

### "Comprehensive Immigration Reform"

Catholic Charities USA continues to advocate for just and comprehensive policies that address the needs of newcomers. We call on Congress to enact comprehensive immigration policies that not only promote the security of our nation, but also put undocumented workers and their families on a path to lawful permanent residence and citizenship, create greater legal avenues for necessary workers to enter the United States, promote the success of newcomers, and improve the economic prospects, health care access, and safe working conditions for all U.S. residents.

### Investments in the Nation's Social Safety Net

People of color disproportionately rely on the social safety net of our country. Programs such as food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid, and Medicare are essential to the survival of many low-income families. Catholic Charities USA continues to call upon the federal and state governments to strengthen and protect these vital programs. We further call for programmatic reforms to address barriers that keep eligible families from accessing these programs



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## Reflect: Matthew 25: 34-40

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Then the Righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

## *Respond:*

What am I currently doing to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the ill, and visit those in prison? What is the Lord calling me to next in this regard?

# Day 29

## Read

### Comprehensive Criminal Justice Reform

Along with the increasing rate of poverty, the number of incarcerated Americans has risen significantly in recent decades. According to the Sentencing Project (2016), the number of incarcerated African Americans in state prisons across the country was more than five times the rate of incarceration of whites. Just as a disproportionate number of persons of color live in poverty, there also is a severe racial disparity in the ranks of the incarcerated. Federal and state criminal justice reforms are urgently needed to address biases in sentencing practices. Further, each year more than 650,000 men and women re-enter communities across America from our nation's prisons. Too few are prepared for their new environments or receive adequate supportive services upon their release. This is a recipe for failure. We, therefore, advocate comprehensive support for newly released individuals so that they can make a better transition back into their communities and become economically productive citizens. This includes returning citizens having their right to vote restored.



## Reflect: Hebrews 13: 1-3

"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body."

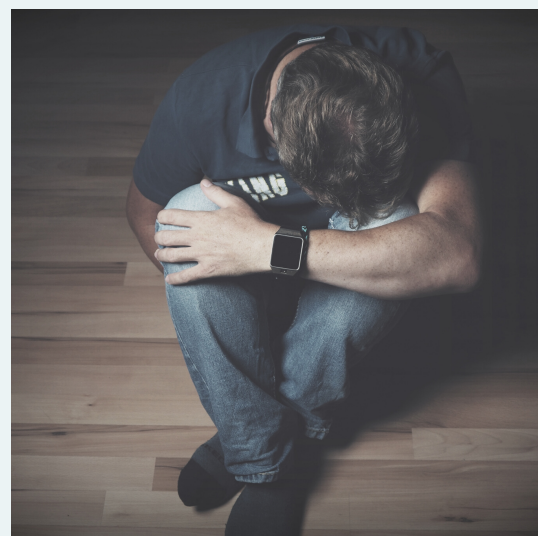
## Respond:

Am I "mindful of prisoners" at all? Am I mindful of them to the point of "sharing their imprisonment"? Why or why not? What could I do to be more aware of the plight of those in prison?

# Day 30

## Read

Few issues engage us so emotionally and viscerally as the issue of racism. A serious encounter and reflection on this reality engenders reactions of fear, defensiveness, guilt, denial, anger, sadness, discouragement, weariness, and even despair. We can also feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenge, embarrassed by our ignorance and lack of understanding, and/or impatient with the slow and limited progress made thus far. Such emotions are real. Yet the challenge is to use them as catalysts for arriving at deeper and truer understandings of who we are and the society we live in. None of us is responsible for the misinformation we have been given about our history. Yet we are accountable for how we use this information once we become more aware of our true situation. What motivates our concern about racism and white privilege is our faith conviction that racism is a "radical evil" which is not only incompatible with Christian faith and belief, but also a dire threat to our nation's future. A new way of understanding what it means to be "American," and who is included in that self-understanding, is urgently needed for both the integrity of our faith and our survival as a nation. Given the momentous shift occurring in our racial demographics, tolerating racial injustice and economic deprivation are realities we can no longer afford to indulge.



## Reflect: Romans 12: 9-21

"Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good, love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.'... Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good."

## Respond:

How can I "rejoice in hope, endure in affliction and persevere in prayer" for and with those who suffer poverty and racial injustice?

# Day 31

## Read

We offer to both our church and society the following affirmations and convictions: Poverty and racial injustice are deeply intertwined and demand simultaneous engagement if effective progress is to be made. Poverty and racial injustice are moral scandals that betray our national ideals of "liberty and justice for all." Poverty and racial inequity are the results of human agency. They need not exist. This means that social reality can be other than the way it is. "Social life is created by human beings, by human choices and decisions. This means that human beings can change things. And therein lies the hope." We conclude with the final compelling words of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter on racism: 'There must be no turning back along the road of justice, no sighing for bygone times of privilege, no nostalgia for simple solutions from another age. For we are children of the age to come, when the first shall be last and the last first, when blessed are they who serve Christ the Lord in all His brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and suffer injustice.'



## Reflect: Revelation 21: 1-4

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.'"

## Respond:

What do the "new heaven" and "new earth" look like to me? How do I participate with Christ in bringing about His Kingdom?

## *Poverty Awareness Month* **CONCLUSION**



Thank you for journeying with us this past month through an examination of poverty and racism and how they intersect and overlap with each other to impact Americans. We hope that you were challenged to learn something new, to think about our country and community in a new way, and to imagine a way forward with a new hope.

This devotional guide can be used at any time, so please share with a friend or family member. The work of building a more just society never ends, but we hope that with prayer and contemplation, we have a renewed strength to continue in that work. We undertake the work of racial justice and overcoming poverty with and for the Lord, so let us remember to turn to him with all of our needs.

To read the full document with accompanying statistics please visit  
<https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Poverty-and-Racism-2020.pdf>

*"Rejoice in HOPE" - Romans 12:12*