



**Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap  
Homily  
Mass for Racial Justice  
June 13, 2020 – Castle Island**

It is a privilege for me today to join with you in prayer, we pray first of all for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and all of those known and countless unknown who have been victims of racial violence in our land. Today we pray for healing, reconciliation that will come about by deeper commitment to racial justice and equality. Thank you for your presence here today.

In the 20 years I lived in Washington I came to look forward to the annual event sponsored by the Washington Post, the naming of the person who would receive the most parking tickets during the course of the year. Sometimes I thought I was a candidate. Actually, there was not much suspense; it was always the Russian ambassador. Diplomats do not need to pay fines, so I am sure that was a factor. A bigger factor was that we were in the Cold War, and the Russians were seen as the evil empire and deserving of as many parking tickets as possible.

At the time of Jesus there was a bitter cold war between the Samaritans and Jesus own people, the Jews. I have always considered the parable of the good Samaritan my favorite. I like to imagine the impact that this story made on Jesus' audience when the world was hearing this parable for the first time. The hero of the story is a member of a persecuted and despised minority group. In those days the words "good" and "Samaritan" did not appear in the same sentence.

In the parable Jesus describes a man beaten by muggers and left half dead by the side of the road. Some very respectable people, even clergy, happened by; but looked

away, and passed by on the opposite side. The Samaritan came by and saw the man in pain, he did not turn away, he did not pass to the other side of the street. He was moved with compassion. I wonder if it did not occur to the Samaritan that by drawing near, he was taking a risk. People could look at him and say with suspicion: “there is a Samaritan, he must’ve beaten and robbed that nice man bleeding by the side of the road.” I am sure that the Samaritan knew what discrimination was. He would have suffered the sting of humiliation, suspicion and rejection whenever he ventured outside of his own community.

Jesus original audience would have felt uncomfortable with this parable. They would’ve been embarrassed, perhaps indignant. How could a Samaritan be the hero? Jesus is reminding us that so often we judge people by their appearance by their circumstances. We focus on what differentiates us rather than what we have in common. In another place in the Gospels Jesus tells his disciples to learn to turn the other cheek, to give your cloak as well to the one who asks for your tunic, to go 2 miles for person who bids you go 1 mile. The good Samaritan was certainly a man who went the extra mile. He does not call 911 and drive away. He draws near, he gets mud and blood on his clothes. He puts the injured man on his mount and takes them to a safe place. Then he pays for the man’s care. The Samaritan commits to follow up by coming back and taking care of any other expenses.

Like the Samaritan we have to understand that there is no quick fix for the harm that has been done. We need to return again and again to face the situation, to nurture change and recovery. It will not happen without the sustained effort and focus of all. It is not enough to draw near once for demonstration or a prayer service and then turn our backs and cross over to the other side of the street. The symbolic gesture or compassionate word is not enough we need concrete reform, transparency and determination to do what needs to be done to pay the price to work together and make it happen. This may be our last chance. It is impossible to exaggerate the sense of urgency we must have as Americans.

Christ’s most beautiful parable comes to us because of two questions from a lawyer, of all people. Questions that were posed with cunning and malice. Yet they are very important questions that we must ask ourselves. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The answer is love God and love your neighbor, then you will live. The second question, was a face-saving one, “who is my neighbor?” This is the question that Americans must ask ourselves today. So many studies have shown how we are isolated by ZIP codes, by racial, ethnic, and religious divides. We live in bubbles that allow us to turn away from each other and cross to the other side of the street.

Jesus is telling us that our neighbor is not just the person who looks like me, talks like me, thinks like me, or roots for the same baseball team.

The neighbor is the Samaritan. That is the punch line, that is the surprise. The Samaritan is the one who draws near, who crosses the barrier, who cares because he knows every single person matters.

George Floyd was left by the side of the road, crushed on the ground. We cannot turn our backs and walk away without being guilty bystanders. George Floyd was not just murdered by a rogue police officer. He was murdered by slavery, and its legacy of racism. He was murdered by those who turn their backs on racial violence, by those people who teach their children to be prejudiced, by those who know that it is evil, but are too cowardly to speak up, by those who profit by exploiting others, by police unions who failed to see that the best way to protect good police officers is to get rid of the bad ones. We have learned this in the Church. This cannot become a national contest between forces of political correctness and the forces of law and order. Then everybody loses. This cannot be about partisan politics. But if we use this moment to play politics, it will be another false start doomed to failure. Blacks and whites together, Republicans, Democrats, Independence together, people from the Blue Coasts or the red flyover states. Catholics Protestants, Jews, Muslims, agnostics and unbelievers.

At a time like this it is easy to forget how well served we have been by our police force and first responders who at times like the marathon bombing or during the pandemic have risked their lives to protect others. We are blessed by the leadership of Mayor Walsh and Commissioner Gross, who truly care about the community. Wherever there have been problems Mayor Walsh and the Commissioner, along with local clergy have worked hand-in-hand. We all need to work together.

The death of George Floyd fills us all with shame and indignation. It is been half a century It since the murder of Martin Luther King and these horrors should be behind us, but sadly they are part of our present. It has been said that the original sin of America is racism. This is an American problem. It has been 401 years since the first slave ship arrived at Point Comfort and 155 years since the last enslaved Americans were freed in Galveston. This is in our history; it is in our DNA, and together we need to find a vaccine, or it will destroy our country.

We have to become Samaritans. The Samaritan did not turn his back and walk away, he could see not just the differences with the man by the side of the road, he could see his humanity, his connectedness. He wanted to be his neighbor. Racial tolerance

is not enough. We need reconciliation, solidarity and a commitment to anti-racism. We need to be a real community. We need to take care of and care for each other.

They tell the story of Cardinal Spellman who was the Archbishop of New York who one day received a call on the intercom. It was the new receptionist calling from the lobby of the chancery; she whispered: “your Eminence, there’s a man in the lobby who says he is Jesus Christ, what should I do?” The Cardinal said: “look busy.”. The droll remark of the Cardinal was true, that homeless off-his-meds schizophrenic man is Christ in a distressing disguise, as Mother Teresa used to say.

The person who is hungry, sick, imprisoned, or a stranger is our neighbor, our brother or sister, and for the believer is Christ. We must look busy because God is watching us. He sees not only what we do but what is in our hearts. Indeed, the whole world is watching us. It’s amazing to see the demonstrations inspired by the murder of George Floyd in cities and countries throughout the world: millions of gathered throughout the United States, London, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Holland, Australia, Vienna, Norway, Rome, Liberia, Canada, Greece, Berlin, Paris, Korea Barcelona, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro, Hungary . The world is watching. The world wants more from America, the world wants a better America. If America is to champion democracy, human rights, equality, freedom in the world, we need to clean up our own act. The death of George Floyd has shaken many of us from our complacency and our complicity. We need to show the world and each other that we are truly committed to justice and that we are capable of transformation.

The world needs a better America where racism and inequality will not be tolerated. The pandemic has unmasked the disparity of healthcare along racial lines in our country, we are painfully aware of the high incarceration rates and lower life expectancy of black Americans. The economic inequities and lack of opportunities are direct results of the vile institution of slavery and its poisonous legacy of racism.

We are in an historic moment that cause us to stand together as Americans, to be neighbors to each other to overcome racial prejudice and institutional racism.

Racial tolerance is not enough, the antidote to racism is not just tolerating each other. The cure is solidarity and community. We have to want to be neighbors, to be brothers and sisters, even when we are not twins.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is our daily reminder of how God’s gift and our work come together. We bring our gifts to the altar; God transforms them and we receive them back and are transformed ourselves, more prepared for our mission to

bring compassion, justice and healing into our broken world. As we contemplate the figure of the Samaritan whose courage and sacrifice made him neighbor to the man half dead, the man who could not breathe, lying on the ground, let us heed Jesus command from today's gospel: "Go and do likewise!"