



December 7, 2020

My Brothers and Sisters,

At the 244th Convention of the Diocese of New York, one month ago, a resolution was offered and approved to designate the Third or Fourth Sunday of Advent as a time of thanksgiving for the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution on December 18, 1865, which abolished chattel slavery in America. That amendment did not end the enrichment of individuals and corporations in America from the practice of slavery - a struggle which continues to this day - but it did end the centuries-old institution of slavery as America had known it. We intend in this diocese, on one of the Sundays closest to that anniversary, to offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for what that act meant immediately following the Civil War, and what it continues to mean for us in the twenty-first century as we still carry the banner proclaiming that Black Lives Matter, and still seek repair for the long consequences of slavery in this country.

We are called to give thanks now, even in remembrance that in that same year of 1865 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church considered the matter of slavery to be still too divisive for the church even to take a position on it. We give thanks now, even in remembrance that at the time of the Civil War the Convention of this Diocese of New York refused to condemn slavery or the institutions in New York which continued to profit by it. So, our thanks are made now in contrition, for the barriers which were erected in this diocese to stifle that new breath of freedom and quality which was blowing in America. And our thanks are made now in hope, too, that our God, who has brought us this far by faith, will strengthen us to finish the course unto that day when the long struggle for racial justice and equality is won.

The resolution calling for this day of prayer was drafted by Mr. Evan Davis of the Church of the Heavenly Rest, together with that vestry, and with the support of Ms. Diane Pollard. In offering that resolution, Evan observed that “racial injustice is ... a vital concern in our religious practice and belief and a necessary corollary of the commandment to love our neighbor and our baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every person.”

Below is a prayer which you may include in the intercessions of your parish on that Sunday of thanksgiving. It has been written by Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, Dean of EDS at Union Seminary. Dean Douglas was the preacher at our convention liturgy this year, and powerfully so. With this letter, I am inviting every parish to honor the letter and spirit of our convention resolution with this prayerful observance of the 155th anniversary of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Your reflections on this observance will be sought, as part of the resolution calls on the Diocese of New York to carry this forward to the next General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2022. We want to include your voices as we commend this anniversary practice to the larger church. With every good wish, I remain

Yours,

The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche  
Bishop of New York

**A Prayer of Thanksgiving**  
**The Very Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas**

Almighty God of Moses and Hagar, Creator and Redeemer of us All:

We come to you in thanksgiving for your liberating promise of justice where all your children will one day be free;

We offer thanks for the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment which brought an end of *chattel* slavery in this land;

We offer thanks for the work of those abolitionists who fought tirelessly to end the sin of chattel slavery remembering especially the too often overlooked Black abolitionists such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Henry Highland Garnet, Sarah Parker Redmond, William Still, and Frederick Douglass;

Grant us, Loving God, forgiveness for our complicity with white supremacy and anti-blackness that gave rise to chattel slavery and continues its legacy in other forms;

Grant us, Liberating God, the moral wisdom, moral leadership, and moral courage to continue the work of freedom, until our world and society becomes a place free from the sins of white supremacy, anti-blackness or anything that would betray the justice that you promise all of your children.

Help us, O God of the disinherited, to be church and thus to lead the way to a world free from the pleas for black lives to matter, because they will matter.

Help us to never be content until that time when heaven has come to earth and all of your children are free to live into the fullness of their created potential. *Amen.*