

## A Letter on Racism and Prejudice

April 19, 1981

My Dear Friends:

As we celebrated the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus last week, there were many reflections which held our attention as we saw that Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus continuing in the life of human beings today. In a world prone to be torn apart between nations, in a society where violence has become a taken-for-granted fact, and in our own communities where people are divided against one another, Holy Week offered us the opportunity to reflect upon the dignity of the human person for whom Jesus Christ suffered, died and rose so that all people might enjoy His gift of life and grace.

One of the primary contradictions of human dignity is the reality of racism and prejudice which still exist in our society. In November of 1979, the Bishops of the United States issued a pastoral Letter on Racism which deserves our attention. Racism is usually not one-sided; it affects people on both sides of the barrier that separates them because of language, cultural, or racial differences. Each community should examine its own conscience to determine what action must be taken to combat this evil lest racism surfaces a violent hatred because of the failure of people to respect, to trust, to communicate with one another.

In 1979, the Bishops of the United States wrote:

"Racism is a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights.

"Racism is sometimes apparent in the growing sentiment that too much is being given to racial minorities by way of affirmative action programs or allocations to redress long-standing imbalances in minority representation, and government funded programs for the disadvantaged. At times protestations claiming that all persons should be treated equally reflect the desire to maintain a status-quo that favors one race and social group at the expense of the poor and the non-white.

"Racism has been part of the social fabric of America since the beginning of European colonization. Whether it is the tragic past of the Native Americans, the Mexicans, the Puerto Ricans or the blacks, the story is one of slavery, peonage, economic exploitation, brutal repression and cultural neglect. All have suffered indignity; most have been uprooted, defrauded or dispossessed of their lands; and none has escaped one or another form of collective degradation by a powerful majority. Our history is littered with the debris of broken promises and treaties, as well as lynchings and massacres that almost destroyed the Indians, humiliated the Hispanics, and crushed the blacks.

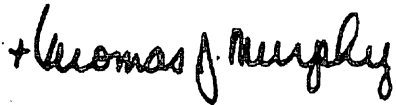
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"Therefore, let the church proclaim for all to hear that the sin of racism defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind, which has been revealed by the mystery of the incarnation. Let all know that it is a terrible sin that mocks the cross of Christ and ridicules the incarnation. For the brother and sister of our brother Jesus Christ are brother and sister to us."

During Holy Week, we were asked to examine our hearts to reflect on the human dignity we share. But reflection is not enough. We are asked as followers of the Risen Lord to bring about a new era and a new day in the respect and love we have for one another as brothers and sisters of the Lord.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Thomas J. Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings, MT