

6th Sunday of Easter

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

May 9, 2021

Today we heard that St. Peter and Cornelius, a gentile Roman centurion, have visions from God which bring them together and result in the first conversion of gentiles to Christianity. This watershed moment eventually led to the Council of Jerusalem in which it was determined that gentiles, that is ALL people, were welcomed into the Church without conforming to Mosaic law; a Christian didn't have to become Jewish first! Christians were, as we heard in the Gospel reading, to keep God's commandments and "love one another," as Jesus loves us. We're commanded to love ALL; not just some.

Sounds simple doesn't it; however, we're human. Over the last two millennia, we haven't done such a good job of loving one another as Jesus loves us. As a result, we've have had to contend with a number of societal ills: Poverty, homelessness, and racism to name just a few.

Before I go any further, I wish a happy and blessed Mother's Day to all mothers who have given us the gift of life! This day, in tribute to our mothers, brings to mind the words of a speaker, a black deacon, that I heard at a recent meeting of the National Association of Diaconate Directors (NADD) in St. Louis. This deacon from another diocese in Missouri opened his presentation with the statement:

The Church is a Mother—Mothers are used to cleaning up other people's messes and the Church today is saddled with cleaning up the societal mess of prior generations.

By any standard, this deacon has had a highly successful career, rising to second in-command with the Missouri State Highway Patrol; he was, subsequently, appointed Chairman to the Missouri Board of Probation and Parole and, most recently, served as Executive Director of the Missouri Gaming Commission.

However, he wasn't there to tout his achievements; rather, he shared with us a number of his experiences with racism: From his time as a new recruit in the 1970s when he was treated, with utter contempt, by some of his fellow state troopers to his many other experiences, some subtle and others not-so-subtle, in which people treated him differently solely due to the color of his skin.

One event, which he relayed to us, that stands out in my mind is when he was out for a jog along a rural Missouri road when a truck-load of white teenagers came along and poured buckets of muck on him (who knows what was in those buckets) then, spouting racial epithets, sped-off laughing.

My first thought was: Where did those kids learn such despicable behavior?

Upon reflection, I realized that such behaviors are passed down from generation to generation, sometimes through overt racist acts and behaviors and sometimes subtly through a snide remark, here, or acceptance without comment of another person's racist remark, there.

Subtle, and not-so-subtle, racist attitudes lead to overt racist behaviors and actions.

As the deacon passionately conveyed to us, until Jesus commandment to "love one another" is a reality, that while "all lives matter, not just black lives; we need to remember all lives are not equally at risk. Racism is a sin!"

It's up to us, **all of us**, to clean up the societal mess of prior generations and to fulfill Jesus' commandment to love one another. I can think of no better tribute to our mothers on this Mother's Day than to begin, here and now, to eradicate the long-standing scourge of racism in our society. As the deacon said in his concluding remarks, "We cannot alter our past, but through Jesus Christ we can bring our past to the altar."