

Happy Monday to all!

On this date, December 1, in 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus. This act of defiance was a catalyst for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a 381-day protest that ultimately led to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional. Parks' action became a pivotal moment in the Civil Rights Movement, and she is remembered as a symbol of the struggle for equal rights. Unfortunately, 70 years later, prejudice and racism still affect our society – both on an individual level as well as institutionally.

A high profile example occurred on May 25, 2020 in Central Park, New York City. Amy Cooper, a white woman, called the police on Christian Cooper, a Black birdwatcher, after he simply asked her to leash her dog. She falsely reported that an African-American man was threatening her life and later made a second 911 call falsely claiming he had attempted to assault her. The incident was captured on video and went viral, sparking national outrage.

Ms. Cooper's actions were deliberate, and counted on the reality that in most cases the police were more likely to believe the story of a white female versus a black male. It was a glaring example of a white woman “weaponizing” her vulnerability to exact revenge and hardship upon a Black man. It was an example of what “white privilege” actually means in society today.

Racism remains deeply entrenched in systemic and institutional structures -embedded in the normal operations of institutions such as the housing market, educational system, criminal justice system, and labor market.

Even individuals who explicitly disavow racism may still hold unconscious biases absorbed from growing up in a racially stratified society. For decades, media representations idealized white Americans while marginalizing people of color -contributing to the reinforcement of racial stereotypes. Institutional racism is much like a subliminal message through which racism is subconsciously perpetuated and reinforced. In most cases, those affected by it are completely unaware of the changes taking place in them...and how those changes affect their day to day thoughts, feelings, decisions, and actions.

Catholic Social Teaching on prejudice and racism centers on the belief in the inherent dignity of every person-created in the image of God- and teaches that racism is a grave sin that divides the human family. It calls for overcoming *all forms of discrimination* by recognizing the equal value of *all people*, and it extends this principle to addressing systemic inequities and inequalities through advocacy and institutional reform. The Church encourages personal conversion alongside efforts to challenge and eradicate racism in society.

As the charity and justice arm of the Church, Catholic Charities puts Catholic Social Teachings into practice in ways that are easy to implement and productive when practiced. Catholic Charities acknowledges the God-given dignity of each and every person. Catholic Charities does

not base our assistance- to any person seeking our help- on any identifying characteristic or level of status associated with the individual.

May we all strive to overcome both our own personal biases, as well as those embedded in our society. May we live according to the Catholic social teachings that form the foundation of all that Catholic Charities does and our faith believes. May we all remember and embrace the inspiring words of another civil rights leader, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "We cannot walk alone. And as we walk we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back."

Together let us pray that we will one day exist in a society that refuses to turn back to the "grave sin" of racism.

Blessings to all!

Deacon Mike