

CATHOLIC RACIAL JUSTICE STUDY SESSION

The following study session can be done alone or in a group such as a parish council meeting, a bible study, RCIA, or religious education classroom for older students. It is intended to be an opportunity to pray, learn, reflect, and act for racial justice. It centers the discussion in prayer and on scripture while utilizing videos and discussion questions to more deeply engage in the material. Some elements may be challenging as they may be a whole new way of understanding racial justice. We are called by the Church to actively engage in the dismantling of injustice around us, including racial injustice. The term anti-racist is used in this program intentionally. The word itself implies action on the part of the person. It is not enough for us to simply be non-racist we must actively engage in the world around us to disrupt and dismantle racism in relationships as well as institutions and systems. May God guide you through this session and may we all become closer to him through it.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, author and lover of peace,
to know you is to live, to serve you is to reign;
defend against every attack those who cry to you,
so that we, who trust in your protection,
may not fear the weapons of any foe.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

(from the collect of prayers "In Time of War or Civil Disturbance" ; Excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* ©2010, ICEL. All rights reserved.)

OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC OF RACIAL JUSTICE

Watch the Video from the Catholic News Service and then reflect on the study questions.

Video: https://youtu.be/-iShltrq_I8

Discussion Questions

1. In the Pastoral Letter of 1979 "Brothers and Sisters to US" the US Bishops declared Racism a sin. "*Racism is a sin: 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.*" The bishops' 2018 Pastoral Letter "Open Wide Our Hearts" stated clearly that it is a life issue. "*Too many good and*

faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life."

Why is it important that the Church directly acknowledges that racism is a sin and that it is a "pro-life" issue?

2. The 1979 document also addressed racism within the Catholic Church and by Catholics:

"How great the scandal given by racist Catholics who make the Body of Christ, the Church, a sign of racial oppression! Yet all too often the Church in our country has been for many a "white Church," a racist institution.

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice."

What might be the reasons why, as the bishops stated in "Brothers and Sisters to Us", that the church *"has been for many a 'white Church,' a racist institution"*?

3. The Bishops, in the 2018 document speak of institutional and systemic racism. Referencing [paragraph 1869 of the Catechism](#): *"Racism can also be institutional, when practices or traditions are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. The cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism."* The bishops stated in both the 1979 and the 2018 documents on racism that the Church is herself guilty of not only interpersonal racism but institutional racism as well.

Where do we see institutional and structural racism in our society today? Where might institutional and structural racism be found in the church?

SCRIPTURE AND WITNESS

[Gospel Reading From the Third Sunday of Lent; Year A Scrutiny readings](#)

Watch the Ted Talk with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie then reflect on the discussion questions: <https://youtu.be/D9lhs241zeg>

Discussion Questions:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the *"single story"* and how it influences the construction of our beliefs and perspectives about others or institutions.

At the time that this Gospel story of Jesus occurred Jews and Samaritans generally considered the "other" as enemies. Jews and Samaritans trace their heritage to the

earlier Israelite people (as alluded to in the Samaritan woman's stating that the cistern was from "*our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks*"?) During the Babylonian exile the two groups began to diverge in culture and religion; though remaining quite similar.

After the exile when they come back together conflict arises and the "*single story*" that is told in the Scriptures is from the perspective of those who were exiled and their descendants, the Jewish people. Jews saw Samaritans as having abandoned the true religion of their ancestors and that the Samaritans had become too much like the Greeks and other "foreign" groups. This is the background to the story of the animosity and hatred towards Samaritans in the time of Jesus. Jesus seems to interrupt this "single story" with his interaction with the Samaritan woman.

1. When the disciples see Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman how does their reaction reflect the "*single story*" that they have of Samaritans? The woman leaves as soon as the Disciples show back up. What might have been going on in her thoughts when a group of Jewish men arrive seeing Jesus talking to their "enemy"?

2. The Samaritan woman at the well is surprised when Jesus, a Jewish man, speaks to her and requests she give him some water. The "*single story*" of Jews and Samaritans being enemies causes her surprise that her dignity as a person is being acknowledged from someone who, in her likely experience, she had only ever received scorn and rejection. Jesus is willing to drink with her from the same bucket. What do you think it meant to the Samaritan woman that Jesus rejects this "*single story*" of rejection and scorn from Jesus, a Jewish man?

3. How often do we accept the "*single story*", like the disciples, without further introspection or investigation?

4. What do you think it means for Catholics to have the Church and her ministers recognize their value as members of the Church? What might it mean to Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) if the Church would be more engaged in incorporating and acknowledging more than the "*single story*" of a Euro-centric church?

5. What can we do in our parish and community to disrupt the "*single story*" about BIPOC people and communities, especially in the church?

NEXT STEPS

Pray - [Stations of the Cross for Overcoming Racism](#)

Listen - Listen to the voices of Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander Catholics. One great place to start is the presentation made by Servant of God Thea Bowman to the US Bishops in 1989: <https://youtu.be/uOV0nQkjuoA>

Learn - Read the US Bishops Letters on Racism - "[Brothers and Sisters to Us](#)" and "[Open Wide Our Hearts](#)"

Act - Advocate for laws and policies that promote equity and inclusion of all people in the Church and society.

[Follow The Iowa Catholic Conference for Updates on State legislation](#)

Issues in society might include working for expanded Voting Rights and access to the ballot box, Economic, Employment and Housing opportunities, and Criminal Justice Reform.

Consider ways in which the parish life or Catholic institutions you are involved can make racial justice a priority.

[One way is to review the Cultural Competency Modules by the USCCB](#)

Repeat - Becoming Anti-Racist people and institutions requires vigilance and continual renewal.

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer to Overcome Racism from the [USCCB](#) Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism:

Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other. We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another. We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society. We ask for your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person. Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us. Amen