

Prayer Service for Black History Month

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: During Black History Month, we celebrate the promotion of positive values of our African American leadership, through advocacy, through professional life, and through the arts. These values echo the main principles of Catholic social teaching, and we pray that such values become respected by all Americans.

OPENING READING: Isaiah 11:1-10

Reader 1: “A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.



Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fating together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.
They will not hurt or destroy any creature on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Reader 2: Human Dignity, from Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall

“In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.”

All: We pray for respect for the human dignity of our African American sisters and brothers and for all people.



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Two: Respect for Life, from Archbishop Wilton Gregory (Atlanta, Georgia)

“Some now choose to disinvite the sick and the elderly from the table of life when their needs become too apparent or too great or too much of an inconvenience for us. We have restored the death penalty. But we cannot dismiss those who might share in the gift of life from the banquet of human existence—truly contrary to the sentiment of the Gospel and to the tradition of hospitality that is so much a part of our communities.”

All: We pray for respect for life in all our communities.

Reader 3: Family, Community Participation, from Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A.

“I want to be present. I want to be ready. I want to share what I have—my life, my laughter, my love, my joy. I want to give to you as I receive from you. I want to learn from you. I want my children to learn from you so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past, so that we can grow together and walk together and talk together and live together in love, in joy, in peace forever.”

All: We pray that all African Americans as well as all others are invited to participate in the development of policies that shape family and community life.

Reader 4: Rights and Responsibilities, Rosa Parks

“I realized we should all be free people and we should have the same rights as other people. In the South, at that time, there was legally enforced segregation. There were places black people couldn’t go, and rights we did not have. This was not acceptable to me. A lot of other people didn’t disobey the rules because they didn’t want to get into trouble. I was willing to get arrested — it was worth the consequences.”

All: We pray that the rights of all members of the African American community, and of all peoples, are respected, and that all take on the responsibilities of freedom.

Reader 5: The Common Good, from Congresswoman Barbara Jordan

“Many seek only to satisfy their private wants, to satisfy their private interests. But this is the great danger America faces. That we will cease to be one nation and become instead a collection of interest groups: city against suburb, region against region, individual against individual. Each seeking to satisfy private wants. If that happens, who then will speak for America? Who then will speak for the common good?”

All: We pray that the African American community, and all people, can speak out for the common good and be heard.

Reader 6: Option for the Poor, from Marian Wright Edelman

“God has blessed us in America with more riches than some of us know what to do with, yet we let millions of our children go hungry, without shelter, and without other basic necessities of life. Here we are blessed with the best of health technology, yet we have places where our children’s immunizations rates fall behind those of some developing country and eleven million children are without health coverage. We must take care of our children who suffer from poverty.”

All: We pray that we see and respond to the poverty in the African American community and in all our communities.



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Reader 7: Work and Workers' Rights, from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The fact is that the work which improves the condition of mankind, the work which extends knowledge and increases power and enriches literature and elevates thought, is not done to only secure a living. It is not the work of slaves driven to their tasks either by the task, by the taskmaster, or by animal necessity. It is the work of men who somehow and a form of work that brings has dignity and hastens a better state of society where want is abolished.”

All: We pray that all workers, including our African American sisters and brothers, are given opportunities for decent work with fair wages and working conditions.

Reader 8: Solidarity, from Maya Angelou

“Here, on the pulse of this new day
You may have the courage
To look up and out upon me. . .
Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes,
Into your brother's face, And say simply
Very simply
With hope, Good Morning.”

All: We pray we stand with civility and in solidarity with all Americans, including our African American brothers and sisters.”

Reader 9: Stewardship of Creation, from Alice Walker

“Helped are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm, for to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity. Helped are those who love the Earth, their mother, and who willingly suffer that she may not die; in their grief over her pain they will weep and in their joy in her lively response to love, they will converse with all living things. Helped are those who love and actively support the diversity of life; they shall be secure in their differences.”

All: We pray that all members of our diverse human community respect Creation.

Leader: We are grateful for the articulation of values from our African American leadership. We pray to our common Father that we work together to create justice and peace for all Americans. Let us end with the words of Langston Hughes, who gives voice to this prayer: “I Dream A World.”

All: “I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth And peace its paths adorn
I dream a world where all will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white, Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind—
Of such I dream, my world!” Amen.



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