

A Catholic Response to a Violent Nation

Dear Brothers in Holy Orders,

We have all been shaken by last week's heinous, racially-motivated mass murder in Charleston, SC, and the shooting of a police officer in Cincinnati. My reaction to both is one of deep sorrow. At the same time, however, I am inspired by the survivors and family members whose Christian faith has empowered them to forgive the attacker.

Last Sunday's Gospel amazed us with Jesus' power to calm the storm. As we watch what seems like a storm of shootings around the country and in our own Archdiocese – often with a racial dimension – we may feel like crying helplessly with the prophet Jeremiah, 'Peace, peace,' they say, though there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).

In 1994, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote:

Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence. We have an obligation to respond. Violence -- in our homes, our schools and streets, our nation and world -- is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers. Fear of violence is paralyzing and polarizing our communities. The celebration of violence in much of our media, music and even video games is poisoning our children. Beyond the violence in our streets is the violence in our hearts. Hostility, hatred, despair and indifference are at the heart of a growing culture of violence. Verbal violence in our families, communications and talk shows contribute to this culture of violence ... Person by person, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, we must take our communities back from the evil and fear that come with so much violence. We believe our faith in Jesus Christ gives us the values, vision and hope that can bring an important measure of peace to our hearts, our homes, and our streets. (Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework For Action)

More than twenty years later, those words still resonate. In the biggest cities of our Archdiocese, Cincinnati and Dayton, shootings are up more than 20 percent this year compared to a year ago. This disturbing trend also has plagued many other communities. As we have seen to our sorrow, even a house of worship is not safe from a horrendous act of violence.

And yet, our faith is not diminished, for "our help is in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 124:8). In the upcoming Gospel for the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus restores life to the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official. This is a powerful reminder that Jesus conquered death and darkness. Let us be intentional in forming his disciples who are credible witnesses of God's love for people of every nation, race and language. Our prayers, our solidarity, and our actions as peacemakers are needed more than ever. In this time of increasing fear and concern, I am grateful for the many faithful who have joined with others throughout their communities to bring peace and healing.

As we stand together in the power of prayer, I encourage you to use the following (or similar) intercessions at Mass this weekend:

For the Church and her leaders, that we may be a sign and instrument of the peace of Christ and serve as credible witnesses to nonviolence in our homes, in our places of work, and in our communities, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**

- 2) For a society that values and protects all human life; for our communities plagued by violence and racial division; for those who keep peace and protect our communities from harm, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**
- 3) For each one of us: for courage to speak out against the hatred that leads to acts of violence; and for a willingness to teach forgiveness and nonviolence by our own lives, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**
- 4) For the mercy of God to rain down upon us and to disarm our hearts of prejudice and hatred; for the Spirit of God to lead us in the way of compassion, mutual respect, and love, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**
- 5) For those whose lives are torn by violence: for children who live in fear because of violence in their neighborhoods; for families who have lost loved ones at the hands of guns; for healing of broken hearts, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**
- 6) For a new generation of peacemakers who champion the cause to turn away from violence and create a culture of racial healing, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**
- 7) For those who have died [pause]: may they dine with Christ, the Prince of Peace, at the heavenly banquet, we pray: **God of peace, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer to the Intercessions:

Presider: God of peace, be with us now as we hear your word of peace and healing. Help us to become your holy people who choose to follow the way of life, justice, and nonviolence. Create in us a desire to love our enemies, reconcile with our neighbors, resist injustice and pursue a world in which your love reigns. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Or

Presider: God of Peace, we thank you for inclining your ear to hear us. We know that you always hear the cries of the people you have called your own. May the prayers of our

hearts for the whole human race be acceptable to you through your Son, our Lord, Jesus, the Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati

6/23/15