

Fr. Josh Johnson-Homily July 12, 2016

Read by Fr. Randy Cuevas for Prayer Service for Peace

As you may imagine, I get a lot of questions from people when racially charged events appear in the news. I'm often asked what I think about these events.

Last week began with the death of two Black men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castille at the hands of Police Officers and ended with the death of five Police Officers in Dallas Texas and the injury of several civilians. These deaths have led to much anger, confusion, tension, division, and fear amongst people in our city, state, and country.

So in the midst of all of this, what should our response be? Though I am certainly not an expert on anything, my thoughts after much time spent in prayer are quite simple: WE SHOULD ALL PRACTICE LISTENING

With that being said, I would like to invite you all to listen to some of my thoughts:

To put things in a little perspective I would like to share my background with those of you who are not aware of where I come from. My Father is an African American and was for many years the Captain of the Police Department in Baton Rouge. My mother is White and for many years served as a Registered Nurse at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital.

Growing up as a Bi-Racial male in Louisiana wasn't always easy and in many cases not much has changed since my teenage years.

I can remember being in the grocery store after a basketball game as a teenager and being followed by the security guard and/or the cashier. Though this experience was always aggravating to me, I was used to it because in many cases, no matter how well a black man is dressed in our society he will probably be followed around because of the color of his skin. It's interesting, since I have become a priest not much has changed. After working out at the gym two weeks ago, I was followed in a store the entire time I shopped by the cashier. When I wear clerics people respect me. But when I wear civilian clothes to work out, my experience growing up and being judged for the color of my skin continues to this very day. This is very disappointing and this disappointment is shared by many African Americans in our country. Some of you may have never experienced discrimination in this way but this is NORMAL for US! And THIS is NOT OKAY! Hence, many black people in this country are hurt and angry.

I remember a number of my friends growing up hated cops because their only experience of cops were the bad ones who relentlessly harassed them for no other reason than because of the color of their skin and the neighborhood they lived in. Their hatred for the police was obviously problematic for me as a young man because my father was a cop... And a very good cop at that. In fact, on one occasion, a man attempted to rob a bank here in Baton Rouge and shot my father in the back of his head. My father, being the good cop that he was, immediately chased the guy to protect the lives of the civilians at the bank. I tried to express to my friends that there were good cops but some of them, because they were close minded and thought they knew everything chose not to listen.

Here is something I want everyone to hear: White people are not the problem Black people are not the problem Cops are not the problem Refugees are not the problem THE DEVIL IS THE PROBLEM

And the tool the devil has been using to divide and conquer us with violence and racism and fear is THE LIE that "I know more than you so I don't have to listen to you."

This is a big problem!

Because if we don't listen to one another then we cannot know the other person as another person and if we don't know them as another person then we probably won't be willing to enter into a relationship with the other person and if there is no relationship then there is a possibility that the other may be judged and categorized into a box and from that categorization become our enemy and this is BIG PROBLEM because our real enemy is not flesh and blood but is actually SATAN!

So how can we practically fight against the vice and the lie from Satan that we "KNOW MORE THAN OTHERS?"

By first turning to our Lord in Prayer. The Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing from heaven to earth for hundreds of years and her message is always the same... "COME BACK TO MY SON JESUS CHRIST THROUGH PRAYING ROSARY AND YOU WILL HAVE.... PEACE!"

How is this practical? Because when we pray the Rosary we meditate on Jesus Christ Who is the Prince of Peace and we spend time Actively Listening to the story of Jesus, to His-Story, and then we spend time in silence trying to listen more to the God we encountered in the Scriptures as we prayed the Rosary. This can be difficult. But if we persist in trying to hear his voice in prayer then our disposition in prayer, that is, Listening, will overtime become our disposition in relationships with other people!

If we can listen to God Who we cannot see, then we can certainly begin to listen to our brothers and sisters who are different than us and whom we can see!

If we want peace with others then we have to know others and the most practical way to know others is by first knowing God.

So I invite you to join me in committing to praying every day for at least thirty minutes if possible and in that time of prayer carving out space for silence so we can intentionally not speak, but struggle to listen to the voice of Jesus, Who will no doubt enable us to be an instrument of peace after spending time with Him Who is Peace.

