



Pastoral Letter
To read at all Masses
on 15/ 16 February 2025
6th Sunday of Year C
Racial Justice Sunday

My dear friends,

As we mark Racial Justice Sunday, I would like to share with you a few reflections.

Our diocese, and particularly Merseyside, has been shaped by the influx of migrants who have helped contribute to creating its unique and diverse cultural richness, including the first Chinese community in Europe. Although slavery and famine were the unhappy triggers for Black and Irish people to settle, we have been enriched by them in many and diverse ways.

By 1850, when the Diocese of Liverpool was founded, there was already a long history of immigration into the area. More recently, in the period after the Second World War there was Windrush and Commonwealth immigration to provide workers for our factories, transport system and health services. Today, the changes continue with many Asylum Seekers and Refugees arriving to escape wars and persecution. Our society has become dependent on people from far-away countries to provide essential services.

It is true to say that without that constant change most of us and our families would not be here.

The early church was full of the same diversity. You'll remember the reading from the Acts of the Apostles that we hear at Pentecost and at Confirmations about the descent of the Holy Spirit. It's an awesome moment when the room shakes with the power of God. No language, race or culture is favoured because the Good News is for people "from every nation under heaven".

We naturally love the place we are from and call it 'home'. It's where we feel we belong but that doesn't make one place superior to anywhere else. What remains true is that we are all children of God, all sharing the same baptismal dignity. No one is more baptised than anyone else: not the Pope, not your Archbishop, not your parish priest.

Our challenge is to see one another as people not as categories of superiority, whether we judge by race or creed or age or gender or qualifications or status or clothing or any measure of how to mark people out as different. What counts is surely the things that we have in common: our dignity as humans and our dignity as children of God. We share the same aspirations for ourselves and for our families.

Few people would describe themselves as racist, but the experience of racism depends very much on where you are in the pecking order of superiority. Sadly, we live in a world in which racism continues to provide many ugly examples of humankind at its most violent and oppressive. Learning from our own historical past, our prayers should be focused on ensuring that we remain a more inclusive and welcoming sign of hope.

Let us appreciate that people from other countries have enriched our culture and are a gift to us. Let us not forget that our own country benefited from our colonial past, a past many of us are reluctant or ashamed to speak about.

I encourage you to engage with these issues in the parish and to look for ways that your parish can become more welcoming and more inclusive. Does your parish address the subject of racism or are you afraid to mention it? Do you turn a blind eye to the presence of racism? Is the parish council representative of the congregation? Are the various ministries in the church representative of the parish. Do people see themselves represented in the various roles; the welcomers, the choir, the readers, the collectors, the eucharistic ministers, the children's liturgy team? Does the liturgy reflect the cultures that are present in the parish? Do we celebrate the different cultures that are increasingly present in our parishes? Do our statues of saints in our parish represent the diverse

racism in the Catholic Church such as images of St Martin de Porres, St Paul Miki and St Josephine Bakhita.

Looking beyond the confines of the parish community, recent tensions in the Middle East have exposed the tensions and prejudices that exist in society at large. We are seeing a rise in Islamophobia and many British Jews no longer feel safe in their own country. Refugees and immigrants who have come to serve society in the caring services are attacked verbally and physically and made to feel unwelcome. This is surely not the wish of the Holy Spirit who came to the Church at Pentecost and guides us today.

I believe we can all make a positive difference by looking into our hearts and carefully examining our attitudes to others and ask forgiveness for the ways in which we have acted in a racist manner. We might surprise ourselves as to how often we have behaved in this way. I also want to encourage each Family of Parishes to bring together a group of people to examine the topic of racism, both in and outside the Church. There are many members of our parishes who have experience of racism, and we all need to hear from them. Our aim is to raise awareness of this problem and to find ways of making it a thing of the past. As a sign of our commitment, the archdiocese is developing a range of resources collectively called 'Welcoming Parishes'. I encourage you to take part in this initiative. It's time for another change.

I wish you and your families every blessing,

+ Malcol

Archbishop of Liverpool