Issue : Faithful Citizenship and Racism

*"Other direct assaults on innocent human life and violations of human dignity, such as genocide, torture, **racism**, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified. "(Faithful Citizenship, #23)*

The Issue:

The Permanent Observer of the Vatican to the United Nations observed:

"The community of nations still seems to have difficulty in addressing racism. It is as if some deep-seated fear or social inhibition prevents us from addressing this widely pervasive phenomenon with serenity and objectivity." (March 25, 2003)

What the US Catholic Bishops stated in 1979's pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, still rings true today:

"Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society. Movement toward authentic justice demands a simultaneous attack on both evils. Our economic structures are undergoing fundamental changes which threaten to intensify social inequalities in our nation. We are entering an era characterized by limited resources, restricted job markets and dwindling revenues. In this atmosphere, the poor and racial minorities are being asked to bear the heaviest burden of new economic pressures."

Reflection for an Election Year and Beyond:

The 2008 Bishops' statement on Faithful Citizenship again talks about racism:

Two temptations in public life can distort the Church's defense of human life and dignity:

The first is a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed.

The second is the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity. **Racism and other unjust discrimination**, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, or an unjust immigration policy are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act. **These are not optional concerns which can be dismissed.** Catholics are urged to seriously consider Church teaching on these issues. (Faithful citizenship, #27,28,29)

Questions for Reflection:

1. In 2000, ***Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself: US Catholic Bishops Speak Against Racism,*** a collection of bishops letters, was published. It was the first major work of US Bishops since the 1979 pastoral letter, ***Brothers and Sisters to Us***. Are we not seeing the problem that exists?
2. The face of racism looks different today. Four types have been identified: spatial referring to development patterns that created economically and racially segregated suburbs or sections of cities, institutional referring to social and racial superiority patterns, internalized referring to the devaluation of groups through lack of education highlighting contributions of minority groups, and individual attitudes. Are you aware of these and their effect on our communities?

Call for Action

"The time has come for us to help our people engage in honest and constructive dialogue that will lead to reconciliation, trust, and understanding. There are those who feel there are no racial problems. Still others, and perhaps the majority of people, want to deal with this scar, but do not know how or where to begin. When Mr. Byrd's sister was asked by a reporter about how she felt toward the three men who had brutally killed her brother, she responded that she and her family forgave them because they were not brought up to hate. Armed with the Word of God and the social teachings of the Church, we must help our people so that Jesus' prayer, "That they might all be one," can indeed be a reality. And so let us not grow weary or tired in our own efforts to eradicate racism and to promote true peace and reconciliation among those we serve."

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"Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself, US Bishops Speak Against Racism"
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