

PASTOR'S PONDERINGS . . .

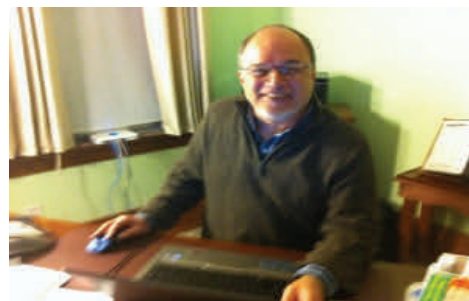
Having spent my formative years as a child, growing up in Reading, Ohio in the 1950's and 60's, in a predominantly white neighborhood, I have to say that I have always been affected by racism without really being aware of it and knowing how to name my feelings about it.

Sitting on the front porch that day, with my parents, when black and African American people were marching for their civil rights all the way from downtown Cincinnati on Reading Road through Reading, we watched the Reading police drive passed our house multiple times, three to a patrol car with rifles in their hands, protecting the borders of the city and ready to defend us if a riot would occur.

I can remember neighbors angrily gathered down the street, also with rifles, ready to take matters and justice into their own hands if the need demanded it or maybe even if the need didn't demand it. As I look back on this, I can honestly say, not so much because I felt it but because I was led to believe it, that I should be glad that my skin is white and that I am not hated and underprivileged like people of color. Racism affected me early in my life by hardening my heart and causing me to be unaware of how we acted or what we said was racist. We were always given good excuses for not feeling and thinking that racism was wrong.

It wasn't until I started to claim a strong interest in my faith that I could feel and admit that racism was truly wrong and horribly sinful. I must realize my own sinful tendencies in this regard and know that the temptation and thoughts are always there, but these feelings and thoughts do not have to control me. I can choose not to act on them. How do I feel about racism, now? I feel the need for forgiveness, mercy and lamenting the wrongs and injustice of racism today. Without mercy, forgiveness, and sorrow for racism, I remain in bondage to this evil.

The Gospel of the Lord is my way and guide to freedom. Accepting that there is no special privilege because of the color of one's skin in the kingdom of God, without exception, we are all members of God's family, equal and precious in God's eyes. The Gospel calls me to hear the cries of the poor of my brother and sister immigrants and refugees who are most troubled by racism today, to stand with them in their hurt and pain and help them find their voice for rights and justice in this country. Together we work for comprehensive immigration reform to over-turn the effects of the evil of



racism that holds them captive in this country.

When visiting the families and parents of our parishioner families in Guatemala, I am told by the parents that their children are not criminals like they are being treated when they cross the border. Nor are they evil or demonic as they are often made out to be. Many, if not most, are good, faith-filled people who are fleeing for their lives from the corruption and political unrest in their own country. They want opportunities to provide for their families and they want to contribute to the well fare of this country. Some go to incredible sacrifice to come to this country to seek healing for their sick children and to get excellent medical attention.

When telling their story and fighting for their rights, there is some drawback. Sometimes there is the cry to "shoot the messenger!" Sometimes others will argue that our country has the right to defend our border at any cost and that immigrants shouldn't come here unless they can speak and learn English. Others will say that our neighborhoods aren't safe because of them, they take jobs away from Americans, and we can't mix religion with politics.

This kind of reasoning, stereotyping, and falsifying is done to justify treating immigrants and refugees with meanness and rejection. Especially today, I believe racism is calling me to treat all others with the respect and dignity God has given them and to love others as God loves us. It is the only way that anyone can be truly free.

~~ Father Jim

"My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." ~~ Pope Francis



St. Leo's Prayer Wall is a place where all, regardless of age, race or creed, are invited to sing God's praises, give Him thanks, and/or call upon His presence for help in times of need. The wall, a place of prayer for all peoples (much like the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem), captures the faces of the community, as well as peacemakers and saints who have inspired us through the ages.

The Wall is a place for staff and volunteers, youth groups, community meetings, and for individuals who pass through our parking lot on the way to work, school, etc., to pray, reflect and pause. We invite you to share in this special way of prayer, joy, and thanksgiving. Praise God! God cares about every need in your life and knows what you need even before you ask Him for help. Our St. Leo the Great parish community promises to remember you in our private prayer, as well as in our communal prayer, which is to say that we are praying for you all the time.

All prayer requests are held in strictest confidence. [Send your prayer request to: Saint Leo the Great Church, 2573 Saint Leo Place, Cincinnati, OH 45225.](#)