

Thank you! It is such an honor to be with you, to be back with “the family,” to still be considered part of the family even though I’m playing with a different franchise these days! I am grateful for my history with three Ignatian communities in particular – Saint Joseph’s University, Boston College, and Fordham University – who have given me tools and perhaps more importantly the *courage* – to take up the calling of my vocation as a theologian everyday.

For about 10 years now, ever since I started making pilgrimages around Philadelphia looking for God in community murals and the people who make them, walking through neighborhoods in North Philadelphia where great-grandparents and grandparents lived and sensing my connection to the transformation of “ghettos of opportunity” into “ghettos of last resort”¹ and longing to have even an iota of the creativity and resilience of folks who live in them, I’ve discerned the Spirit calling me wade into the troubled waters of racial injustice. I’ve felt called to understand my family, my church, my vocation, what going on in my neighborhood and in my City through the lens of race. It’s not been pretty. It’s not been easy. The way has not been clear. People of color, used to “whitesplaining”² where racism is concerned, are understandably suspicious. There’s not much they haven’t heard before where good intentioned white folks are concerned. An even tougher crowd is my fellow whites—colleagues, students, parishioners, family members—who aren’t always receptive, perhaps to use the words of a PA state representative from Philadelphia, Brian Sims, the first openly gay person elected to the General Assembly, because “when you are accustomed to privilege equality feels like oppression.” And just about everyday I realize how much I don’t know and understand about racism. If white folks are afraid to talk about racism - and trust me, we are - then imagine how terrified I am to talk about it with an intimate gathering of 1,700. 1,700 family members no less!

¹ For this distinction, see Loic Waqant’s *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Study of Advanced Marginality* (New York: Polity, 2007).

² See a helpful essay by Catriona Elder, “Whitesplaining: What it is and How it Works,” on Alternet on 1 October 2015: <http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/whitesplaining-what-it-and-how-it-works>

The waters are deep and troubled. The temptation to stay on the shore is real, never mind the talk of bridges.

But then, I think of my students in "Religion and Racism in America" this semester, half of whom are students of color and half of whom are white, struggling to understand each other across a chasm of racial segregation that is now 20 generations old in the U.S. and that affords them little if any meaningful access to each other's experiences, and I know we've got so much work to do. Not out there, but *right here* in our own family. Just last Wednesday, a class discussion sparked by the violent "arrest" of a black female student in a school in Columbus, SC, revealed just how much we're all held captive by racism, to borrow an idea from Joseph Bardnt, a white pastor with the anti-racist Crossroads Ministry.³ Four white Education majors, in the midst of demanding student teaching, shared frustration and hurt at the disrespect they receive from students and sometimes parents in Philadelphia public schools, the majority of which are populated by blacks, and how that makes them question their blossoming vocations as teachers. Black students in the classroom, most graduates of Philly public schools, shed light on the fact that it's hard to show respect to others when you're constantly disrespected by sub par facilities, not to mention how hard it is to manage the stresses that come with not having enough at home. In that moment, the group took the risk to name the gap and different ways we experience it, we feel it and we felt like we were drowning.

My students, and a timely reflection yesterday by Kevin O'Brien in Mission and Ministry at Georgetown in *Give Us This Day* (thank you Kevin, if you're here) remind me of the call to holy boldness we *all* receive as followers of Jesus:

If not now, then when? And if not me, then who? And if not here, then where?

I know we need bridges, I suspect *you* know we need bridges, but we've got to be intentional with how we go about building them and maybe adjust our sense of where we

³ See Bardnt's chapter, "Captive Christians in a Captive Church," in *Becoming and Anti-Racist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

need to start. And that's what I want to talk about with you this morning. I want to talk about racism *right here* in the Ignatian family, something that creates dysfunction in any predominantly white family, even in the families taking up the call of social responsibility, taking up the call of holy boldness. I want to discuss ways we might go about diagnosing that dysfunction and building bridges of solidarity; and I want to leave you with some suggestions for doing so in your own Ignatian communities.

Part I: Captives of Racism: We're All in this Together

In preparation for the World Meeting of Families in Philly just six weeks ago, PICO (a first-cousin in the Ignatian family!), worked diligently with their affiliates across the country to lift up the *economic* challenges facing American families. Given that families of color disproportionately struggle in our economy of exclusion in the U.S., the PICO Networked dared American Christians – especially American Catholics and specifically Pope Francis – to name racism as a root cause of the problems facing our families in the U.S. In fact, a PICO interfaith delegation went to Rome in early June to meet with some of the Pope's closest advisors to make a personal appeal that the Pope, a Euro-American himself, not miss the opportunity to break the silence among people of European descent in the U.S., about the social sin of racism.

A member of the delegation, Bishop Dwayne Roster, the executive director of POWER, PICO's affiliate in Philadelphia, who stands in the rich prophetic tradition of the black church in the U.S. said: *"We want to push out the Black protestant voice, the immigrant family voice, the voice closest to the pain of police brutality and racial injustice to make the point that you can't talk about strengthening families in America, poverty, or any other issue in this nation without talking about race."*⁴

⁴ See POWER's press release - <http://www.powerphiladelphia.org/news/powers-executive-director-to-meet-with-pope-francis-advisors-at-vatican> - as well as coverage of the delegation's visit in *The National Catholic Reporter* by Joshua McElwee on 9 June 2016: <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/organizers-union-leaders-seek-influence-francis-us-visit-through-vatican-meetings>

My dear brothers and sisters in the Ignatian Family, I don't think it's a stretch to say that Bishop Royster is talking *to us*. We cannot do our social justice work without talking about race. Certainly, we must start with a racial gap that is giant and in plain sight:⁵

- white Americans constitute 64% of the population but hold 88% of the nation's wealth and the income gap between whites and people of color has tripled since 1984.
- When it comes to housing, affluent people of color live in poorer neighborhoods than working class whites, and people of color were more likely than whites to be targeted by subprime lenders and less likely to receive conventional mortgages
- Educational markers are also dismal when we consider that 74% of African American and 80% of Hispanic children attend segregated schools and African American preschoolers are more likely to be disciplined through suspension than white pre-school children.
- Whites use drugs with greater frequency, but blacks are three times as likely to be arrested for drug use and the duration of sentencing for the latter is nearly 20 times that of the former.
- One in three black men will be incarcerated at some point in their lives. This last point is unique to our economic context in the U.S., where corporations make \$50 billion a year in the very process of turning people into "leftovers" in our economy through the prison industrial complex, which some say is returning us to our colonial roots where wealth was generated through the enslavement and disenfranchisement of a particular racial group.⁶

But is being able to cite disturbing statistics enough? We need only to tweak our beautiful and inclusive teach-in role call ritual with an eye for the cities that have become epicenters

⁵ For a thorough and visual overview of the racial economic gap, see Neil Irwin, Claire Cain Miller and Margot Sanger-Katz, "America's Racial Divide, Charted," *The New York Times*, 19 August 2014, http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/upshot/americas-racial-divide-charted.html?_r=1

⁶ See Michele Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012). For Catholic responses to the prison industrial complex, see Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy and Margie Pfeil, *The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

of racial tension to realize our *proximity* to the profound suffering of the racial gap in our own neighborhoods.

- What if Saint Louis University became Michael Brown and the community of Ferguson?
- What if Regis Prep became Eric Garner and the people of color of Staten Island, and Fordham University Akai Gurley and the people of Brooklyn?
- What if the University of Detroit Mercy would shout "Presente!" for Renisha McBride and women of color of Detroit?
- Or if John Carroll University were to jump to their feet for Tamir Rice and communities of Cleveland?
- Loyola Maryland would claim Freddie Gray and Baltimore.
- Strake Jesuit in Houston would stand for Sandra Bland and the folks of Waller Texas.

We must accept, fellow members of the Ignatian family, that racism is killing too many of our brothers and sisters of color, our neighbors, *right here* in the U.S. And in failing to stand in solidarity with these folks, racism is strangling the Ignatian Family too by cutting off, in Joe Feagin's estimation, our capabilities for empathy, which is the most basic of the emotions needed for life in community.⁷

What if we were to remember the names the martyrs of racism in the U.S. in the same way we remember the martyrs of November 16th? I cannot help notice that on June 18th, the day that the Pope released his beautiful encyclical on the environment, a document that tells us that the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor are the same cry, nine people were murdered in a church in Charleston in the name of the same forces of Euro-American dominance that slaughtered thousands in Latin America. Dare we call Mother Emmanuel a *base community* much like those in Latin America given their long history of resisting the powers of Euro-American capitalism by hearing and *doing* the word of God, or given the fact that their pastor was also leader working to address systemic injustice? Do we have the

⁷ See Joe Feagin's ideas about racism and "social alexithymia" in *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

courage to allow the blood of the martyrs of Mother Emanuel to water the seeds of solidarity for people of color in our own communities, in fact in our own schools and universities and ministries? Seeds we have either not planted or not tended to? Dare we remember and acknowledge the presence of:

- Rev. Clementa Pickney... *Presente!*
- Cynthia Hurd... *Presente!*
- Sharonda Coleman-Singleton... *Presente!*
- Tywanza Sanders... *Presente!*
- Myra Thompson... *Presente!*
- Ethel Lee Lance... *Presente!*
- Susie Jackson... *Presente!*
- Daniel Simmons... *Presente!*
- Depayne Middleton Doctor... *Presente!*

Fellow members of the Ignatian family, in the presence of all of these martyrs, we have to ask ourselves some hard questions. Why is it that most Catholics were not able to see the tragic link between the Charleston 9 and that central theme in *Laudato Si* about the cries of the poor and the cries of the earth? Scholars of color in our own Family regularly point that link out for us. Here I am thinking of womanist theologian Shawn M. Copeland from Boston College who says *that what happens to the earth and what happens to people of color in an economy of exclusion created and fueled by white dominance are the same thing.*⁸

We have to ask ourselves why we don't see an immediate connection between the martyrs of El Salvador and the martyrs of black liberation movements in the U.S., between the victims of U.S. sponsored civil wars in central America and the violence of state sanctioned poverty in the U.S. that disproportionately affect people of color and are waged in the name of protecting white interests and power, between the justice work that needs to be done in

⁸ See Copeland's "God Among the Ruins: Companion and Co-Sufferer," in *Violence, Transformation, and the Sacred: "They Shall be Called Children of God,"* eds. Margaret Pfeil and Tobias L. Winright (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2011).

the world and the work that needs to be done *within* the institutions that make up this beautiful, and yet predominantly white, Ignatian Family.

Many members of the Ignatian family at universities around the country,⁹ most notably Fr. Bryan Massingale of Marquette University - have suggested that to do so, we need to turn and face a *culture* of racism in our family, to face the “soul sickness” of racism.¹⁰ This culture helped to create the racial inequality gap when Europeans first arrived in the Americas more than 5 centuries ago, sorting people into arbitrary hierarchies of humanness based on physical attributes, assigning them worth, and then keeping them from organizing around common interests through laws, social mores, and vigilantism. This culture continues to dig a deep chasm in our collective American – and Catholic - psyche and grows the distance between those who are able to flourish and those who struggle to make ends meet. This is the chasm my students and I fell into in class last week.

I'm not talking here about intentional and interpersonal acts of hate or violence rooted in racial bias. Cultural racism might not *explicitly* endorse the acts of violence against black bodies we see on our Facebook pages and Twitter feeds on a seemingly daily basis. But when understood as culture, racism *implicitly* endorses this violence by justifying it as the acts of a few bad apples or madmen from whom the *good* apples can distance ourselves rather than see those madmen as individual manifestations of our collective values; it implicitly endorses this violence by suggesting that those on the receiving end must have deserved it therefore making violence a reasonable form of retributive justice, even to the point of death; a culture of racism simply accepts the structural violence of poverty as normal or as given or as unavoidable making standing by far more reasonable than

⁹ Here is just a sampling of important work on racial justice from scholars at Ignatian institutions or alumni of them: M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2009); Alex Mikulich, Laurie Cassidy and Margie Pfeil, eds of *The Scandal of White Complicity in Hyper-Incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) and *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007); Christopher Pramuck, *Hope Sings so Beautiful: Graced Encounters Across the Color Line* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2013); Jennifer Reed Bouly and Eric Kyle, “Challenging Racism and White Privilege in Undergraduate Theology Contexts: Teaching and Learning Strategies for Maximizing the Promise of Community Service-Learning” in *Teaching in Theology and Religion* 18.1 (January 2015); and Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

¹⁰ See *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

standing up; a cultural of racism implicitly endorses acts of violence against black bodies when it fails to see that the social expectation that white bodies are to be protected at all costs demands the use of excessive force against black or brown bodies. "A focus on individual behaviors and attitudes does not adequately explain the existence of a racialized society, where race is a principle lens for social interpretations and understanding," Massingale says. "Racism is a *cultural* phenomenon, that is, a way of interpreting human color differences that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices of American life."¹¹

Racism, therefore, isn't just *out there*, Ignatian family. The soul sickness *is right here*. It's among us. Dare we name it?

Massingale tells us that for **folks of color**, our culture of racism is a commonly shared experience of struggle in the "face of prejudice, discrimination, rejection, and hostility."¹² I've learned from my students of color in my courses – and it is important to note that I am not speaking for them here I'm lifting up what they have named themselves in journals, in reflection papers, in class discussions, in advising sessions - that a culture of racism is their under-representation in our institutions or not seeing themselves in the faces and experiences of their teachers and professors; it's scrolling through their peers' racist Yaks on Yik Yak and finding no rebuttals or being targets of racial hate in their residence halls or at off campus parties; it's being made into tokens in our predominantly white classrooms with our predominantly white curriculums; it's being silo-ed into clubs or fraternities that don't receive the same institutional support; it's having their membership in our predominantly white university communities called into by campus security; a culture of racism is carrying the burden of being hyper-visible exceptions to the norm and yet invisible when it comes to others expressing an interest in their lives and stories; it's the moment their ideas are only taken seriously if they are made or echoed by a white person, or having to spend more time than you should explaining why all lives *don't* matter if black lives don't matter; it's facing institutional inertia when trying to call these things to the

¹¹ Ibid., 14-15.

¹² Ibid., 19.

attention of whites and white apathy when you cry out against the far worse injustices people who look like face everyday. For people of color, a culture of racism is navigating all of these things and then the never-ending work of building bridges to close what Ta-Nehesi Coates calls, in his stunning memoir of the same title, the gap between the world and me. I suspect it can feel like building a bridge to nowhere.

But the thing about understanding racism as culture is not nobody gets out unscathed. Joseph Barndt of Crossroads Ministries likens **whites' experience** of a culture of racism as one of being "hermetically sealed" by four walls: a wall of separation and isolation as a result of generations of segregation in housing; a wall of illusions of our own innocence and delusions about the magnitude of racial disparities; a wall of amnesia about history and limited capacities for experiencing others' pain; and by power and privilege awarded us by our pigmentation that give rise to defensive postures.¹³ Barndt says a culture of racism is one in which whites "lose our humanity, our authenticity, and our freedom."¹⁴ Unlike folks of color who have these things taken from them by a culture of racism, whites hand them over in order to become and remain white.

Barndt's assessment strikes a cord for me – and maybe other whites in the room – when I think about growing up a white Catholic and a products Catholic schools and communities my entire life. We are like disciples "locked away in the upper room" after the crucifixion. White Catholics in the U.S. are walled off from the reconciling joy of the resurrection because we haven't faced our collective complicity in the crucifixion of people of color in the U.S. We are paralyzed by our unquestioned confidence in what think we know about racism in the echo chamber of our white only conversations or predominately white academies and board rooms, high schools and universities, churches and service teams. We are stuck in a mental space where we reject the need for healing out of fear of those who we've harmed. We are hamstrung by our amnesia where the memory of Jesus' acts of love of the neighbor and forgiveness of sinners is concerned. We are caught in the repetitive

¹³ Joseph Barndt, *Understanding the Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Barndt, *Becoming and Anti-racist Church*, 110.

loop of history to which we respond, at best, with inequality-sustaining charity. We are blinded by our own judgments about the people on the receiving end of our charity, and hijacked by our self-righteous anger when they are not sufficiently grateful. We're burdened by gifts we often don't even know we have and clueless as to how to contribute to movements of inclusion. We are choosing self-isolation in an all-white upper room of our own making rather than encountering the liberating mercy of the wounded and yet resurrected Christ in the people outside the door. Internalization of superiority naturally makes us, in words of faith-based activist John Perkins "self-addicted;"¹⁵ and self-addicted people cannot get out of our own ways; we're not bridges, we're roundabouts – going in circles with our guilt, our ignorance, with our charity.

In a recent address at the synod of Bishops late last month, the Pope helped me understand why the locked upper room of whiteness is so bad for our Church in the U.S., which despite shifting demographics, remains a predominantly white institution. In one of his homilies, Francis said: *A Church with closed doors betrays herself and her mission, and, instead of being a bridge, becomes a roadblock.*

Part II: Building Bridges

So how do we – and here I'm speaking directly to my fellow white brothers and sisters in this Ignatian family – how do we transform the roadblock of racism into a bridge of solidarity, and perhaps, adjusting our expectations a bit, into footbridges within our own communities that might lead to effective bridges to other racial justice movements now well-underway in America? Ideally, the Ignatian Family can and should build bridges to existing social movements engaged in the work of undoing racism. But I'd like to recommend we start to build those kinds of movements in our own home institutions, since we've spent some time acknowledging this morning that racism is just as present here as it is out there. Five pieces of homework:

¹⁵ Shane Claiborne and John M. Perkins, *Follow me to Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 139.

1. **Draw close to the pain of racism, or to use Pope Francis' word, encounter the pain of racism** – on your service team, in your high school class, in your parish, in yourself – in order to release yourself from upper room of fearing pain. Draw close, and then just listen. Turn off the inner monologue and be present to others – and yourself - with your listening. And if you cannot draw close to the pain of racism then read three books: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin, *Between the World and Me* by Te-Nahesi Coates, and *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* by Aimee Meredith Cox of Fordham University. Listen in order to learn how much you don't know and to be humble in discerning next steps.
2. **Get some training** on what racism is, where it comes from, and what we can do about it. This is critical for starting any kind of movement – you need a shared vocabulary, a sense of history, tools for doing an analysis of the systems of white supremacy, and an inventory of challenges and gifts. Talk to folks from Fordham about their experiences with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond; or reach out to Dr. Alex Mikulich in the Office of Mission at Loyola New Orleans to learn about Pax Christi's approach; or seek out Crossroads Ministries. But get training!
3. **Build an inclusive community** of people in your branch of the Ignatian Family who are willing to wade into some of these waters; be sure to pay attention to who's not among you and also who's driving the bus. If there are not folks of color, and folks of color in leadership roles, then you might need to apply some of your training from #2 in order to ask good questions as to why and how you might rectify that.
4. **Do something with your bodies.** Brain-storm and prayer storm about something creative, something performative, something interruptive you can do with your body – individual and collective. Something that will make it difficult for people not to see the pain you're attempting to lift up, something that will make it difficult to see that pain in the same way again, something that will convert hearts to want to join you in the work to change structures in your community.
5. **Love the people in your community** – including yourself with all of your flaws and shortcomings and mistakes, and especially the folks who have hurt you in the past (have compassion for their own pain) and those who disappoint you (again,

yourself). Recognize that your ability to love each other in and of itself is what unmask the lie of racism that says we cannot really trust each other, that we cannot really know each other, that our destinies are not shared. Love is the thing that helps us see that building multicultural communities is often messy, but always beautiful. And celebrate that beauty.

So it is with the deepest love of this Ignatian family that I ask: *If not now, then when? If not us, the Ignatian family then who? If not in our own communities, then where?*