

Racism and the call of the Church –

1. In today's readings we hear:

“If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday.”

“Light shines through the darkness for the upright; he is gracious and merciful and just. Well for the man who is gracious and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.”

“Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

2. The light of glory according to Irenaeus is the human being who is fully alive and to live is to behold God.
3. To behold God: Pope Saint John Paul II tells us that “the guiding principle of Pope Leo's Encyclical, and of all of the Church's social doctrine, is a correct view of the human person and of his unique value, inasmuch as "man ... is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself" God has imprinted his own image and likeness on man (cf. Gen 1:26), conferring upon him an incomparable dignity, as the Encyclical frequently insists. In effect, beyond the rights which man acquires by his own work, there exist rights which do not correspond to any work he performs, but which flow from his essential dignity as a person.” (CA)
4. Almost 16 years ago the same pope, in his Angelus address, also referenced a text from Isaiah that proclaimed “I am coming to gather all nations and tongues: and they shall come and see my glory.” He did so to address the sin of racism in anticipation of the UN World Conference Against Racial Discrimination. He says “In that venue the Church will also vigorously raise her voice to safe guard the fundamental rights of man, rooted in his dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God.”
5. He goes on to say: “Every upright conscience cannot but decisively condemn any racism no matter in what heart or place it is found.” And he recalls the words of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* that tells us “we cannot invoke God the Father of all, if we refuse to behave like brothers [and sisters] toward some of those who are created in the image and likeness of God . . . Consequently, the Church condemns, as contrary to the will of Christ, any form of discrimination among people, or persecution perpetrated for reasons of race or color, social condition or religion.”
6. He calls the Church to a “culture of reciprocal acceptance, recognizing in every man and woman a brother or sister with whom we walk in solidarity and peace. Therefore, there must be a vast work of education in the values that highlight the dignity of the person and safeguard his or her fundamental rights. The Church intends to continue with her efforts in this area, and requests all believers to make their own responsible contribution of conversion of heart, sensitization and formation.”
7. Benedict XVI gets to the heart of the matter in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, which reminds us that love is the heart of Christian faith because being a Christian is an encounter with a person who calls us to respond to being loved by loving others. There is an unbreakable bond between love of God and love

of neighbor such that love of God is a lie if we refuse a relationship with our neighbor. As the indispensable core of the Christian life within the community of believers, love means that whatever is necessary for a dignified human life can never be denied to anyone. The genuineness of the love of God is primarily disclosed in living the Christian life and the service of charity carries out the Church's love that seeks the integral good of the human person. The struggle for justice and love in our contemporary reality means working from and toward a true humanism.

8. The struggle for justice and love in our contemporary reality means working from and toward a true humanism. Therefore, there must be a vast work of education in the values that highlight the dignity of the person and safeguard his or her fundamental rights.
9. That education is rooted in the Incarnation, which John tells us in his Gospel was the light who appeared in the darkness, but the darkness did not overcome him. Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and do good to those who persecute us. For example, when the Samaritan village refused to welcome him and the disciples James and John wanted to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, echoing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jesus refused to do so but simply continued his journey to Jerusalem knowing what awaited him there.
10. Pope Francis continues in the tradition of Jesus when in his World Day of Peace message he says: "On this occasion, I would like to reflect on nonviolence as a style of politics for peace. I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms."
11. Mission of MU – Lest "Be the Difference" remain merely a hashtag, actually "Being the difference" requires us to respect and value rather than to fear and flee "differences" and "indifferences." For that is what we believe being created in the image and likeness of God means. We are not God. We are different from God. God chose to create and affirm us in our otherness and difference. We are the image and likeness of God to the extent that we, like God, respect and affirm others in their difference.