

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

On Friday, February 5th, the St. Pius school community welcomed the members of the Archdiocesan Race and Reconciliation Committee. The Archbishop convened this group last summer in an effort to address, in a positive and constructive manner, the issue of racism and how it adversely affects communities of color. This group includes Chris Major (Permanent Deacon candidate and Coordinator, African American Ministry of the Archdiocese of San Francisco); Kathryn Parish-Reese (Former California State Corrections officer and longtime leader in the Archdiocese); LyRyan Russell (Administrator, Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory and community leader); Melissa Vlach (Staff, Office of Human Life and Dignity of the Archdiocese of San Francisco); Catie Costa (Vice Principal, St. Pius Catholic School) and Derek Gaskin (Director, Department of Safety & Security-Risk Management of the Archdiocese). They participated in a Zoom conference with the middle school students. They shared their experiences of racism and its effects and the students had the opportunity to engage in dialogue by asking questions and offering their views on this subject. The participation of the students was truly amazing; their thoughtfulness and insightful maturity made this effort so positive and constructive. This Zoom session was recorded and I will make sure it is made available to our parish community. There is much work to be done to address and hopefully eradicate the evil of racism, and the work of our panelists and students is a very constructive move in the right direction. I have asked Marc Nava and Catie Costa to consider hosting a town-hall style panel for our school parents. Stay tuned!

It is hard to imagine that we are already into the middle of February and Ash Wednesday and the great Season of Lent commences this week!!

Today I would like to welcome Rick Boitano of our parish St. Vincent de Paul chapter. I have asked him to speak about the mission and practical work of SVdeP. This outstanding organization serves among the most fragile and vulnerable members of our community. Thanks to the financial support of you, our parishioners, this organization is able to provide food as well as vouchers and rent assistance to those who benefit from this essential lifeline. It is amazing, then even in the midst of a devastating pandemic, our school families and parishioners gave record donations in food for needy individuals and families this past Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons. Over the past few years, particularly, there has been concern about the volunteer challenges facing our SVdeP chapter. Many of the current volunteers are older and it is becoming more difficult to physically handle the demands of bringing groceries to clients. Rick will be speaking to this issue as well. I am hopeful that making a direct appeal for support will be of benefit to all.

The words of St. Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians offer perfect reflection for us as begin our Lenten journey this Ash Wednesday. He encourages us to do all that we do for the glory of God. In prayerful reflection, we can ponder what motivates our lives, what ultimately gives meaning and purpose to our thoughts and actions. On January 28th, the Church celebrated the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the Office of Readings of the Breviary (Liturgy of the Hours read daily by priests and deacons) that day, the words of St. Thomas Aquinas offered a timely reflection for us. As we begin this pilgrimage of self-denial and reflection, we pray that we will understand with more clarity and surety the mystery of the suffering and death of Jesus. Aquinas, a Dominican priest and Doctor of the Church wrote:

“If you seek the example of love: *Greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends.* Such a man was Christ on the cross. And if he gave his life for us, then it should not be difficult to bear whatever hardships arise for his sake.

If you seek patience, you will find no better example than the cross. Great patience occurs in two ways: either when one patiently suffers much, or when one suffers things which one is able to avoid and yet does not avoid. Christ endured much on the cross, and did so patiently, because *when he suffered he did not threaten; he was led like a sheep to the slaughter and he did not open his mouth.* Therefore Christ’s patience on the cross was great. *In patience let us run for the prize set before us, looking upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who, for the joy set before him, bore his cross and despised the shame.*

If you seek an example of humility, look upon the crucified one, for God wished to be judged by Pontius Pilate and to die.

If you seek an example of obedience, follow him who became obedient to the Father even unto death. *For just as by the disobedience of one man, namely, Adam, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man, many were made righteous.*

If you seek an example of despising earthly things, follow him who is the *King of kings and the Lord of lords, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Upon the cross he was stripped, mocked, spat upon, struck, crowned with thorns, and given only vinegar and gall to drink.

Do not be attached, therefore, to clothing and riches, because *they divided my garments among themselves.* Nor to honors, for he experienced harsh words and scourgings. Nor to greatness of rank, for *weaving a crown of thorns they placed it on my head.* Nor to anything delightful, for *in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”*

The words of St. Thomas Aquinas are as relevant to us today! Although written so many centuries ago, these words are a living and practical guide for us as we enter into this most holy season in preparation for the passion, death and resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I am most grateful to Almighty God for the decision recently rendered by the United States Supreme Court. Throughout the pandemic, the Roman Catholic Church and other places of worship throughout this country has been singled out for harsh restrictions by several large states, principally among them New York and California. Rightly, the high court asserted that the unequal treatment of people of faith is unconstitutional. The flagrant and state-sanctioned bigotry towards people of faith has been very troubling and alarming. Yet, we have remained peaceful and prayerful, hopefully setting an example for the rest of the community.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, we will be celebrating Mass indoors. We ask that we continue to respectfully observe the protocols outlined to ensure the safety and health of all. Again, I am grateful beyond measure for all the hard work of staff and volunteers to keep us all safe. I pray that we begin to gather together again for Mass.

–Fr. Tom