

Living Our Four Franciscan Values Today

Sisters and Brothers All:

Racial Healing from the Heart of St. Francis

Systemic Racism

January 2021

Contemplation - Conversion - Poverty - Minority

For Francis of Assisi, the concepts of systemic racism, unconscious bias and white supremacy were unheard of, alien to the world-view of 13th century Italy. But Francis certainly was aware of the effects of social and economic disparity. He had seen it play out in the tensions between the majores and minores of Assisi, in the relationship between Perugia and Assisi, and in the treatment of outcasts in his society, particularly lepers.

In his conversion, Francis was captivated by the humility of Jesus in the Incarnation, that He would humble himself to become human, to identify with us. Francis adopted a stance of humility, modeled



after Jesus, and desired that his followers be minores, in contradistinction to the wealthy and powerful majores. They were not just to care for the poor, but to identify with them, to live as sisters and brothers with all people, especially those who are poor, marginalized and without voice in our world.

While we seek to live more deeply onto our charism, we are also immersed in a culture built on systemic racism, where racial prejudice is expressed not only in individual

actions of discrimination, but is deeply woven into our culture and institutions. How can we stand aside and see what is happening around us? How can we stand side-by-side with those who are ignored, those who are discriminated against, those whose rights are violated?

For Reflection:

“Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society.” USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, #36



- * After the Civil Rights Act of the 1960s, what changed in our society? What still needs to be changed? What, at this moment in society, doesn't allow for that change?
- * How does my contemplation of the Incarnation and of the crucified Christ invite me into deeper sisterhood/brotherhood with those who are disadvantaged in our culture?
- * Do I foster relationships with people of other races and/or cultures? How has this perspective encouraged my personal growth?
- * Would I be willing, for the sake of racial justice, to let go of aspects of my middle-class status?