

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we celebrate, as a national community, our nation's birth. The freedoms which made this great experiment possible involved a revolutionary war and its inherent dangers and violence. As we know only too well, our democratic experience has not been without its contradictions and imperfections. Our imperfect Union, however, has been a beacon of hope for generations. The enduring promise of America is that anyone can come here and make for a better life for themselves and their posterity. There is much work to be done to "form a more perfect union," to be sure, but to not acknowledge the truth of so much good would be to deny the toils and tireless efforts of generations of Americans who stood up to fight for and defend a more just society.

The Roman Catholic Church has featured prominently in the history of the United States. In 1789, Pope Pius VI named Fr. John Carroll the first bishop of the United States, in the See of Baltimore. Charles Carroll, his cousin, was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. Bishop Carroll had been a member of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits until their suppression. He was the first Archbishop in the United States when the See of Baltimore was elevated to an archdiocese and the founder of the first American Catholic university, Georgetown. Georgetown, under the aegis of the Society of Jesus, is one of nation's preeminent centers of higher learning and its magnificent campus is nestled alongside the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.

In 1791, Bishop Carroll wrote a prayer for the care and protection of the young country, and it bears praying today, especially in this time of division and frustration. May his words give us pause for reflection, gratitude for all the good produced by the United States of America and hope that the injustices which remain will be addressed and our nation healed.

"We pray, o almighty and eternal God, who through Jesus Christ has revealed thy glory to all nations, to preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church, being spread through the whole world, may continue with unchanging faith in the confession of your name. We pray Thee, who alone are good and holy, to endow with heavenly knowledge, sincere zeal and sanctity of life, our chief bishop, the pope, the vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the government of his Church; our own bishop, all other bishops, prelates and pastors of the Church; and especially those who are appointed to exercise among us the functions of the holy ministry, and conduct your people into the ways of salvation. We pray O God of might, wisdom and justice, through whom authority is rightly administered, laws are enacted, and judgment decreed, assist with your Holy Spirit of counsel and fortitude the president of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness and be eminently useful to your people over whom he presides; by encouraging due respect for virtue and religion; and by a faithful execution of the laws in justice and mercy."

Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, in response to the death of George Floyd, has convened a working group of Catholic parishioners from throughout the Archdiocese to devise ways to address systemic racism. I have been asked to chair this committee, the focus of which is reconciliation and race relations. We held our first lunch meeting here at St. Pius on Thursday, June 25th. This is a very impressive group with a long history of service to the African American community. Recognizing that education is an important component in this dialogue, our own St. Pius Catholic School vice-principal Catie Costa, is on the committee. Other members include: Kathryn Parrish-Reese (Epiphany Parish and Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women); Sherman Tillman (SFFD and President of the Black Firefighters Association); Cruz Hyland and Stewart Highland of St. Francis of Assisi Church, East Palo Alto); Valerie Schmalz, director of the Office Human Life and Dignity of the Archdiocese); Derek Gustin and Julio Escobar (Archdiocese of San Francisco); Christopher Major (candidate, Permanent Diaconate and community leader in Marin County); Fr. Larry Goode and Monsignor John Coleman (St. Francis of Assisi Church, East Palo Alto) and Walter and Lori Hoye (nationally recognized community leaders). We will be meeting again on July 9th. I wanted to share this news with you in an effort to express how important this issue is to me and to our local Church and that we are doing something positive and constructive. Please pray for the success of our committee and for the communities, most particularly, who are feeling most acutely the effects of social and economic racism and injustice.

Let us remember in our thoughts and prayers Fr. Kyle Faller as he begins his new apostolate as Parochial Vicar of St. Raphael Church in San Rafael. We had many wonderful conversations these past months and I cannot thank you enough for making him feel appreciated and valued during his time with us. Your expressions of thanksgiving and sadness at his re-assignment made him feel, and rightly so, that his ministry with us here at St. Pius was fruitful and made a difference!!

I also want to express my deep gratitude for the many words of support and prayer upon the death of my very good friend, Fr. Ken Westray. I knew Fr. Ken for thirty-five years; in every sense he was a mentor, friend, and big brother. He influenced the lives of so many people and we are most grateful to God for bringing this very special priest our way!

Fr. Tom