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Reflection Date: February 3, 2019 - 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Challenged to Follow Jesus

In [this week's Gospel](#), St Luke tells what happens when Jesus offered challenging words to the people of Nazareth about their relationships with other human beings. The people become so uncomfortable and "filled with rage" that they try to "hurl him off the cliff." While Jesus' teachings often bring us comfort, they should always challenge us. How do we react when the Gospel not only challenges but contradicts our ideas about ourselves or about others? What do our readings say to us today, on this first Sunday in February when we in the United States celebrate Black History Month?



In their recent pastoral against racism, [Open Wide Our Hearts. The Enduring Call to Love](#), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops state that "Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, all humans ...are equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and—all too often—hatred." When we automatically dismiss any person or group of people, scapegoat any person or group, create boundaries between ourselves and any other human being, treat any person as if they are inferior to us, what do we say to God?

It does not matter how many prayers we "say," how many religious services we "attend"; while he walked this earth Jesus did not teach us how to worship him, but Jesus taught us how to follow him. This is what made the people in Nazareth so angry. We cannot "rejoice with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:7) when we assume the worst about any person or when we act out of a sense of superiority or control over another. These readings impel us to question: Does prejudice, racism, or "othering" define our relationship with any other human being? If the Gospel does not challenge us to examine and reorder our relationships with each other, we are not listening.

The readings also assure us though that God is with us on every step of our journey, especially during those times when we find it challenging to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. "For I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." (Jer. 1:19) Jeremiah felt the presence of God when called to be a prophet to Israel. Saint Luke tells of when Jesus knew that same presence when he was rejected by his neighbors in Nazareth. (Lk. 4:30)

Jesus always took action to challenge the injustice of his time. The Bishop's recent pastoral states "racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered." The call to speak out and take action has been the core to the mission and history of the [Franciscan Action Network](#) for the past 10 years.

Sr. Maryann Mueller, CSSF
FAN Board Member

Suggested Actions:

This week, reflect on this photographic series called "[Stranger Fruit](#)" by John Henry, who reimagines the Pietà in moving photographs of black mothers and sons.

Suggested Petitions:

May our hearts be open to the love of the Lord and may we share that love generously with others. We pray...

When faced with rejection, may we remember the strength we have in Jesus and bear our cross with trust in the Lord. We pray...

Collect Prayer:

**Grant us, Lord our God,
that we may honor you with all our mind,
and love everyone in truth of heart.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

Amen

Catholic Organizations Respond to the Polarization and Racism that is still Prevalent in our Society

As Franciscans we celebrate the dignity of the human person, understanding that human beings are created in the image of God. To reinforce this profound respect for human life, on the occasion of Martin Luther King Day, FAN was one of multiple advocacy organizations who sent a [joint statement](#) to Congress last week urging them to face the moral crisis and end the political polarization that exists in the U.S. Catholic organizations are invited to endorse the statement by going to <https://tinyurl.com/EndorseFacingtheCrisis>.



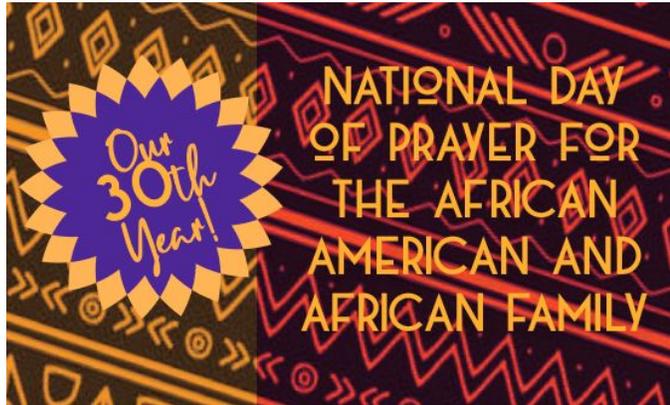
On March 21, we hope you will be observing with us the [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#). On that day, in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid in Sharpeville, South Africa. We will continue to update our members with any resources we find for hosting prayer vigils and other events.

We offer as reflection a photographic series called "[Stranger Fruit](#)" by John Henry, who

reimagines the Pietà in moving photographs of black mothers and sons.

Sunday February 3rd is the National Day of Prayer for the African American and African Family

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the [national day of prayer for the African American and African Family](#), founded by Fr. Jim Goode, OFM. We urge all our members and friends to join us in prayer for our African brothers and sisters on the first Sunday of Black History Month, February 3rd.



Click here to [download "Share the Journey"](#), a guide which includes a prayer and ideas for ways to celebrate the day.

Celebrations of 800th Anniversary of Meeting Between St. Francis and Sultan of Egypt

The general Minister of the OFM's, Fr. Michael Perry, released a [letter](#) last week which invited all to take time this year to study and prayerfully reflect on the encounter and how we as Franciscans might be able to build bridges of interreligious dialogue.

The letter included special [intercessions](#) that Fr. Perry encourages use of during the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the anniversary year, as well as news of an online resource book available in April. He challenges those who may lack personal exposure to Islam to "meet a Muslim" and get to know them beyond "the pleasantries of a cup of tea and social nicety."



In response to this letter, we heard from Dr. Janice Novello, OFS, who frequently attends our national solidarity table calls. She informed us that a screening is happening at Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church in Lakewood Ranch, Florida in February. Tonight, in Washington, DC, FAN's own Patrick Carolan will be speaking at a day long symposium on Capitol Hill with Muslim, Evangelical, and Protestant leaders are working to bridge divides.

We are encouraged by all this peace building activity and urge all our members and friends to plan an event this year in celebration.

Family Separation Continues Under Dubious Standards and With Little Information

America's Voice [reported](#) last week that reports coming out of the office of the Inspector General have confirmed that the Trump Administration has been obscuring the extent of cruel and inhumane family separation policy.



"In July 2018, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at HHS, the agency charged with the care and custody of separated children, certified to a federal court that there were 2,654 children that ORR believed were separated by DHS.

Yesterday, the Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS IG) reported that there were "thousands" more children separated by DHS that have not previously been disclosed." You can [read the entire report here](#).

We offer in response an opportunity to join the first [Justice for Immigrants](#) (JFI) webinar this year on **Wednesday, Jan. 30th at 2 PM Eastern / 11 AM Pacific**. On the webinar, partners working to assist migrants on the U.S./Mexico border will discuss some of the work they are doing. You can join on the computer with this login: bit.ly/BorderWeb or on the phone with this Dial-In:(267) 279-9000 and Passcode: 648174#

Finally, we urge all organizations to [sign onto this letter](#) for **national, state and local organizations** to the 116th Congress outlining the recent harmful changes to the refugee resettlement program under this administration, and urging Congress to hold the administration accountable to operating the United States Refugee Admissions Program in good faith and meeting the 30,000 refugee admissions goal for FY19. **Spread the word among your networks as the deadline is close of business day on Thursday, January 31st.**

In D.C.? Participate in the Interfaith Dialogues about Human Trafficking and Immigration

The [Center for Cultural Engagement](#) at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. is hosting a program on February 4th as part of the Intercultural Dialogues series. A panel discussion with representatives of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington will discuss why people of faith need to stand



against human trafficking. Panelists include Most Rev. Mario E. Dorsonville and Rabbi Gerry Serrota. For more information, please contact culturalengagement@cua.edu.

Additionally, the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University is hosting “[Beyond the Wall: Human Impacts, Moral Principles, and Policy Directions](#)” on Immigration on February 4th. This conversation aims to bring together faith leaders who will try to refocus the debate on moral and human costs. For more information or to RSVP, [click here](#).

OSF Philadelphia Devotes a Year to Education and Action about Harmful Impact of Plastics

FAN Institutional members, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia [Care for Creation Committee](#) has decided to devote 2019 to information and action about harmful impact of plastics. Each month, the sisters will be posting monthly actions that you can take to help make our world a better, cleaner, and safer place. [January's resource is available here](#).



You or your community have resources for ways to care for God's creation, please [let us know](#) if we can promote them to our national network.

Take Action: Show Your Support for HR1: For the People Act

Last week, we celebrated the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a man whose living example represented democracy at its finest -- organizing people together to fight for equity and justice.

Last week also saw the 9-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling -- one of our democracy's lowest points that put our elections up for sale to corporations and special interests.



We The People overwhelmingly demanded change through our votes last fall. We want a government that works for all of us -- that gives us all a say and puts our needs ahead of special interests. That is why FAN has joined a coalition of public service and good governance organizations in [demanding that Congress makes a bold show of support for our democracy](#) -- and supports the strongest possible version of the For The People Act.

This legislation ensures a democracy where voters are protected from discrimination and can make themselves heard at the ballot box. A democracy where electoral districts are drawn fairly, so that every voter's ballot is worth the same. A democracy that isn't bought and paid for by the highest corporate bidder. And a democracy where ordinary Americans -- more women, people of color, and working people -- can run for office without relying on special interest Big Money.

We encourage our members and friends [add your name to urge your representative to support HR1.](#)