

4 Easter B

April 25, 2021

St. Patrick's

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!”

This past Good Friday noon, for the 25th year, we at St. Patrick's had the Way of the Cross through our neighborhood. It linked the sufferings of Jesus at Calvary with the story of our city and the sufferings of Blacks who endured injustice. A hundred of us made the procession around the neighborhood, including Bishop David.

The Seventh Station on our Way of the Cross was at the site of the 1866 “Memphis Massacre Memorial,” located at the corner of Second Street (B.B. King Boulevard) and G.E. Patterson, about six blocks from here. It took place from May 1st through the 3rd, in the very year this parish was founded, 1866. Part of the prayer for this Seventh Station, written beautifully by parishioner Le Martin, was worded like this: “The local news called this a ‘Negro riot.’ In truth, it was a massacre by white people angry and afraid of economic decline from the loss of slave labor” right after the end of the Civil War.

As the bronze memorial at the site tells it, the massacre murdered an estimated 46 Blacks, raped several Black women, and devastated the area, burning to the ground four churches, twelve schools, and 91 other dwellings.

No one was prosecuted for this massacre in 1866. If only there had been a smart phone back then! There wasn't a 17-year-old like Darnella Frazier, who captured the murder of George Floyd with her smart phone video. Without that video, ex-police officer Derek Chauvin would not have been found guilty this past Tuesday.

It's a sad testimony in our nation's history from the beginnings of the colonial days, into 1866 within our own neighborhood; then, 1968 when—two blocks away from that “Memphis Massacre”—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was martyred. It's a litany of those murdered, mistreated, and put to the margins because of their skin color—yes, well into our own time. Rarely has justice been carried out. Slowly, we need to call it as it was—and is—systemic racism in our nation and church, with people of color relegated to the lowest caste.

This Sunday of Easter we heard from the First Letter of St. John, proclaiming with amazement: **“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!”**

Later in this passage, St. John writes: **“What we will be has not come to light.”** He’s referring to the end of time, when the Risen Jesus returns in glory. However, after a momentous verdict on the George Floyd murder, this Sunday of Easter we can ask, “What will be...as a nation and church in the future?”

Yes, St. Patrick’s, because of our baptismal consecration, as church we’re truly children of God. Over the centuries, then, we’re called as church to be a sacrament, a sacred sign, of how God embraces all humanity within that sacred family—*God’s* family. It brings together differences of nation, of race, of ethnicity. We’re called to witness that there are no boundaries within God’s family.

This past Friday, after Ms. Lucinda’s burial (our oldest parishioner, a Black woman, at a hundred), I went to the nearby grave of Carolyn Head. I buried Carolyn fifteen months ago, she dying in her fifties from cancer. I had known Carolyn, her husband and son for twenty years. African-American, she had been executive vice-president of Christian Brothers University.

They lived on the corner of Central and Lombardy, with Chickasaw Gardens right behind their home. In 2016 Carolyn was traumatized. Her then tall 14-year-old son was riding his bike through Chickasaw Gardens after school. That evening, on the “Next Door” app for their neighborhood, Carolyn saw that persons in Chickasaw Gardens had posted a warning about a young Black man riding his bike suspiciously through “their” neighborhood. Carolyn and her husband knew that too many parents of Black males had violence done against their children (1).

St. Patrick’s: We are indeed God’s children—all of us! Truly, let’s be formed by the voice of our Good Shepherd, that we be freed of bigotry and truly live as Jesus’ “one flock.”

(1) Isabel Wilkerson writes of what she calls “Intrusion of Caste in Everyday Life,” in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), pp. 208-23.

General Intercessions

April 25, 2021

4th Sunday of Easter B

**Grace us, your Church, to follow the lead of our Good Shepherd;
we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Heal the divisions due to race, ethnicity, and politics, that we truly
be “one flock, with one shepherd”; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Nurture in all people reverence for the earth and care for her
creatures; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**On this Good Shepherd Sunday, increase in our midst the calling of
priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers; and those in lay
ministries; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Give healing to those with Covid-19; give care to all of us in
preventing its spread; give strength to all medical workers; and give
hope to us all; we pray to you, O Lord—**