

Fr. Ronald A. Mercier's Remarks during Interfaith Prayer Service in St. Louis, Sept. 21

Thank you, Archbishop Carlson, for gathering us all here today, and my thanks to all of you for gathering to pray for peace.

Indeed, we gather today to pray for peace, to ask God for the grace to set aside the violence that threatens us. That plea has its roots deep in the tradition of all faiths. For disciples of Christ, we remember that peace was his first gift after rising from the dead.

Yet, the plea for peace can be dangerous, if we stop there and seek only an end to violence without addressing its causes.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that “justice will bring about peace.” Echoing him, Pope Paul VI almost 50 years ago challenged us, “if you want peace, work for justice.” The fruit of injustice is violence, and we know far too much of that in our city, a violence that pits us one against another too often.

The events of recent days have revealed that more than ever, we need justice, a justice that ultimately makes all people feel truly at home, a justice that is God’s desire for us and for which we labor with God.

Those who have raised their voices in protest since last Friday’s verdict remind us that for too many people in this city we love, justice remains an unfulfilled reality. The sin of racism, and the injustice it breeds, ultimately deprives all of us of the ability to be at home, to know peace. As protestors have reminded us, those still burdened by the legacy of slavery know in a deep, visceral way what it feels like to be aliens in their own city, to see their lives given little account.

Yes, we need to pray today for the gift of peace, a gift that God yearns to give us; *but* we must hear too God’s challenge to build justice.

Are we willing to work with God to end the barriers that separate and divide us?

Are we willing to work for justice so that all people of this city have real hope for themselves and for their children and grandchildren?

The Church that shared in the sin of slavery and racism also commits itself to this work of justice.

Pray for peace we must, today and every day, but we must not let our ears or hearts be deaf to the challenge that comes from God in reply: “if you want peace, work for justice.” On this day as we face the reality of injustice and violence before us, let us pray:

O God, as we hear voices of peaceful protest pleading for a better future for all of us, let us hear your voice and respond, not with words alone, but with a solemn commitment to work with you for that justice that makes this city a home for us all. Amen.