



**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2023**  
**Be-Longing: Praying for Unity Amidst Injustice**

**Dublin Opening Service, Christ Church Cathedral, 18th January 2023**

**Homily by Rev. Canon Fr. Paul O'Driscoll from the Roman Catholic Parish of the Travelling People**



“When you are born you are landed!  
Fundamental questions we all must answer are  
Who am I?  
Where am I going in life?  
What forms my outlook on life?

What is my Governing Identity,  
what's the most important identity about me  
[ because we are all a collection of identities ]

When you are born you are landed  
No angel interviewed you in the womb to ask you  
" My Dear, what nationality would you like to belong to,  
what colour would you like to be,

what part of the world would you like to be born in ?  
Would you like to be very beautiful or very clever?  
or a little of both?

When you are born you are landed  
an identity is impressed upon us  
nationality, gender, family, tribe, land,  
language and often religion as well

Much of who we are is what is given to us  
Psychologists will argue that a lot of happiness comes from accepting who you  
are and not fighting it.

The lived answers to these three questions  
Who am I? Where am I going in life?  
What forms my outlook on life?  
determine the authenticity of our lives.  
The challenge is that the choices we make and the roads we take are consistent  
with who we claim to be".<sup>i</sup>

We don't control very much, but we think that we do!  
If we are honest,  
we would admit that even self-control is fleeting and occasional,  
yet we truly believe that the control of others  
and our environment is possible.  
It is intoxicating to believe that we can bend  
the moral arc of the universe to suit  
our preferences, when we clearly cannot.<sup>ii</sup>

Gary Howard addressing white teachers in American Multiracial schools  
explains....

"Racism for Whites has been like a crazy uncle who has been locked away for  
generations in the hidden attic of our collective social reality.  
This old relative has been a part of the family for a long time.  
Everyone know he's living with us,  
because we bring him food and water occasionally,  
but nobody wants to take him out in public.  
He is an embarrassment and a pain to deal with,  
yet our little family secret is that he is rich  
and the rest of us are living,  
either consciously or unconsciously,  
off the wealth and power he accumulated in his heyday.  
Even though many of us may disapprove  
of the tactics he used to gain his fortune,

few of us want to be written out of his will.  
The legacy of racism, which has been fuelled  
and legitimised by our assumption of rightness,  
has haunted the house of collective White identity for centuries.”<sup>iii</sup>

Every experience of racial injustice has individual,  
but also collective, characteristics and consequences.  
When crisis comes, communities experience emotional, physical and  
psychological trauma together.  
Without the opportunity for immediate resolution or relief.  
Always, there is the shattering of equilibrium,  
the shift from balanced exchanges of discontent  
to the ultimate decimation of the social order and the environment.

On 25th May 2020, a Minneapolis police officer  
knelt on George Floyd’s neck until he was dead.  
Shock and stillness settled over all of us  
as 8 minutes and 46 seconds ticked by.  
Pleas to let him breathe were ignored,  
we could not unsee the cruelty.  
We could not admit our collective responsibility,  
although we all knew the truth.  
We continued the public pretence  
that we all have equal protection under the law.

The true crisis for humanity is diminished compassion for others.  
We have allowed the top 10 percent to determine  
the rhythm of our lives.  
As a consequence,  
we choose a type of exclusionary patriotism over freedom,  
Enslavement to market forces  
rather than exploration of our calling and gifts.  
We harm one another and our environment  
because we cannot honour the Spirit  
that enlivens everyone and everything  
and respects our differences.

There is little we can ‘do’ but we can ‘Be’ .  
We can listen,  
we can love our neighbours,  
and we can host the Spirit that flutters over every dawning day.

When I let go of what I am

I become what I might be. (John Heider)

To let go is the precursor to being reborn.

This reflection entitled “The Collective Freefall” I find helpful..

It happens so slowly,  
it happens so suddenly,  
it is safe  
and then it is not.

When it happens,  
we are certain  
about everything,

and then the fall  
strips us of knowing  
and doing,  
and leaves us with  
being.

Together we fall,  
sweaty, shattered,  
and gulping the darkness.      Rev. Dr. Barbara Holmes.<sup>iv</sup>

Racial oppression is a traumatic form of interpersonal violence  
which can lacerate the spirit,  
scar the soul  
and puncture the psyche.<sup>v</sup>

To be wounded,  
we don't have to be located in the same place at the same time.  
We can view crises on social media or television  
at different times and locations,  
and people of different ethnicities  
can still experience the collective trauma  
and wounding of people trapped in racist systems.

If only the harm was seldom.  
If only the events were as shocking  
to the perpetrators as to the victims.  
If only we learned from our mistakes.  
Instead, the wounds inflicted upon entire societies are historical, deep and  
reoccurring.

Wounds inflicted on the community occur  
because of a willingness to do to others  
what we would not want done to us or ours.  
Where do you turn  
when everything that you know and rely upon  
is shattered or withdrawn?  
What do you do  
when there is no reasonable hope of human help  
because everyone in your community  
is in the same situation,  
while others  
who are not being subjected to harm,  
are looking the other way?

Even if we have not personally experienced a collective crisis,  
we bear in our bodies the trauma suffered by our ancestors.  
The sobering fact is that we transmit memories, experiences  
and our interpretation of those experiences through our genes.

To be flawed, wrong, wounded,  
is to recognise that we are in a world of other beings.  
We live and thrive and emerge in an orbit of other beings,  
and that is beautiful and tragic all at once.<sup>vi</sup>

To be human assumes a certain vulnerability.  
To need the touch that can also wound  
is an act of faith.

Too often we ask the wrong questions about our struggling young people, be they  
Travellers or young people of Colour  
Instead of asking "what is wrong with them?"  
We need to ask the trauma-informed question,  
"what has happened to them?"

There is Internalised devaluation.  
An assaulted sense of self - receiving unrelenting messages about their lack of  
intelligence,  
worth, humanness and beauty.

Internalised voicelessness - the inability to advocate  
for themselves or their community.  
The recognition that , collectively,  
we are prisoners of the perceptions of others.

The wound of Rage - rage from the hidden wound

of racial oppression remains unaddressed.  
Young people are more likely to act upon their rage,  
while elders absorb the poisons into their own bodies, diminishing their health  
and wellbeing.

“It is hard to be ALMOST Human”.

This is the recent observation of a mature Traveller man living in the greater  
Dublin area...

Culture is the primary vehicle for delivering healing  
- Culture is medicine -  
connecting with one’s culture  
has both protective and therapeutic value  
promoting resilience and recovery from traumatic events.

Treatment through culture  
may include some or all of the following:  
Language, traditional foods, ceremonies,  
traditional values, spiritual beliefs,  
history, stories, songs,  
traditional plants and traditional journeys.<sup>vii</sup>

We are not just organisms functioning on a biological level;  
Our sphere of being  
also includes stardust and consciousness.  
We all have a spark of divinity within,  
A flicker of Holy Fire that can be diminished,  
but never extinguished.

To quote Pope Francis –  
we are not in an era of change - but - a change of era<sup>viii</sup>

God, Lord of all creation,  
lover of life and of everything,  
please help us to love in our very small way  
what You love infinitely and everywhere.

To pray for one part is really to pray for all parts,  
and so we do.  
Help us each day  
to stand for love,  
for healing,  
for the good,  
for the diverse unity

of the Body of Christ and all creation,  
because we know this is what You desire:  
as Jesus prayed, that all may be one.

We offer our prayer together  
with Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Intro CD - Denis Mc Bride - "Journeying with Jonah"

<sup>ii</sup> Ellen J. Longer, "the illusion of Control," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32,no.2 (1975) 311-328.

<sup>iii</sup> Gary R. Howard, *We can't teach what we don't know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999),59.

<sup>iv</sup> Rev. Dr. Barbara Holmes - *Crisis Contemplation - Healing the Wounded Village* - Centre for Action and Contemplation, 2021. pp 47/48

<sup>v</sup> Kenneth V. Harding, "Healing the Hidden Roots of Racial Trauma", *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, vol.22,no.1 (spring 2013):25

<sup>vi</sup> Bayo Akomolafe on Reality, Post-Truth and Sacred Activism

<sup>vii</sup> Deborah Bassett, Ursula Tsosie and Sweetwater Nannauck - *Our Culture is Medicine* - *Permanente Journal*16, no.1 (winter 2012) :19-27

<sup>viii</sup> Florence, 11th Oct. 2015

<sup>ix</sup> adapted from *Prayer for our community*: [www.cac.org](http://www.cac.org)