

A Prayer for Justice, Compassion, and Community

Source of Life,

We come before You with heavy hearts, aware of the many crises shaking our world and our communities—violence, displacement, inequity, and fear. We lament lives lost, families endangered, and the suffering caused by policies and actions that fail to honor the dignity You give to all.

Grant wisdom and restraint to those in authority. Inspire them to act with justice, mercy, and humanity, protecting the vulnerable and upholding the rights of all people. May laws and policies reflect compassion as well as order, and may communities of faith and conscience serve as witnesses to what is right and humane.

Strengthen us to act courageously and with integrity. Give us clarity to respond to injustice with dignity, to support those in need, and to stand together across differences. May our words and deeds reflect care, empathy, and solidarity, reminding all that how we treat the most vulnerable defines the character of our society.

Comfort those who suffer. Encourage those who work for peace and justice. And unite us, as neighbors and as people of faith, in the resolve to live in a way that honors the sacredness of every life and the health of our shared community.

Amen.

These words are being prayed in houses of faith throughout Schenectady County this weekend. Penned by Rabbi Matt Cutler of Gates of Heaven Synagogue, and affirmed by Schenectady Clergy Against Hate, many of your local faith leaders are concerned and bearing heavy hearts.

We are not alone. In case you missed it, 154 Episcopal Bishops (including our own) penned a letter last weekend on January 31, 2026. Addressed to “Our Fellow Americans,” it poses an important question: Whose Dignity Matters?

Today, February 8, 2026, the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, is also being observed as “Migration with Dignity” Sunday. Across our nation, Episcopal Churches are honoring this day, in accordance with Resolution C031, passed in June 2024 at the 81st General Convention.

I won’t bore you by reading the entire resolution, so I will only highlight a few parts of it. I invite you to research it on your own for more information.

First, claiming their identity as, “people of faith who believe that all people are created in the image of God, [they] advocate for Migration with Dignity, a statement of specific principles about migration that resonate with the teachings of Jesus and our baptismal promise to “respect the dignity of every human being”...

We are all familiar with that Baptismal Vow, yes?

Then, the resolution acknowledges “the increase of dehumanization of ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees”...let me pause there.

I stand before you today, a white person of privilege, who dares to be vulnerable. Humbly, I submit the following witness of the dehumanization of ethnic minorities. Sometimes, it is the personal stories that help break down barriers and build bridges to understanding.

You see, one year ago, in the FIRST week following the inauguration, something deeply hurtful happened to someone I love.

A freshman, on the Varsity sports team, was sitting at the school lunch table minding his own business engaged in a conversation with his friends. A white senior, whom he didn’t know, came over and took a seat at the table next to him. The senior opened his computer and on the screen was a monkey. He looked at the freshman’s brown face, looked back at the computer...repeated this process multiple times for a few seconds...and without saying a word, he shut the laptop and got up and walked away.

Imagine the heavy heart of a fourteen year old boy who was doing nothing, except eating lunch with his friends. Suddenly out of nowhere, he is an outsider. Less than.

The dehumanization of any ethnic minority, “leads to grave and serious mistreatment of these persons.” Again this a quote from that resolution, and the same is true for all ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, or those who cross borders in search of opportunity.

Dehumanization leads to grave and serious mistreatment of people. In this case, the comparison of African Americans to monkeys or apes has been used — in our own American history — to justify the sale of human beings into slavery.

My friends, this is precisely the kind of degradation and dehumanization that Jesus spoke against. There is no excuse for it. At it’s core, it is evil, and meant to divide, break down, and belittle creatures of God. It certainly does not honor or respect the dignity of every human being.

As our Bishops asked last week, we find ourselves in the midst of too many situations causing us to wonder...whose dignity matters?

Turning towards our scripture lessons this morning, the prophet Isaiah calls us to fast and beg for mercy...in the steadfast pursuit of

righteousness. Part of what the church is called to do in these, and all times, is to call out evil that opposes the will of God, to not let ourselves get caught up in making excuses for injustice, or overlooking actions that thwart the goodness of God.

Jesus says “you are the light of the world. Let your light shine before others.”

As bearers of the light, we are all called to bear witness — public witness — to the darkness of the world, to the the dangers of evil at work in the world, and to testify to the Goodness and the love of the Lord. When we fail to do that (no matter what our reason), we are hiding our light under a bushel basket. We are falling down on our promise to respect the dignity of every human being.

Migration with Dignity Sunday gives us a framework, a guidepost to help us answer the question “Whose dignity matters?” It also gives an opportunity to evaluate the ways in which we truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

My dear friends, Jesus calls us to be salty. Not too salty, but salty, nonetheless. He calls us to bear the light — His light — in a world full of selfishness, bigotry, hatred, and violence. In the midst of darkness, Jesus calls us to love. Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger; to love the

stranger; to feed the hungry and care for the poor. Jesus calls us to fierce love, brave love, and courageous love. Love that dares us to stand firm in vulnerability; love that continues to spread love, even in the midst of hate.

Returning to Rabbi Cutler's prayer:

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