



## DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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### OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 24, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In less than a week, we will enter into Holy Week, the most sacred days of the year. Through the liturgical celebrations of the week and as we read the Lord's Passion, we will reflect on Christ's triumphal procession into Jerusalem and then follow Him on the way of the cross, where we will witness His agony and suffering.

This sacred time of the year points us directly to the Lord's cross and the mystery of suffering in God's plan of redemption. Each of us in our own way must learn to share in Christ's sufferings as part of our own discipleship – as the pathway to share in His glory. As the result of the pandemic and its consequential effects there are sufferings we face as a society, like the rise of xenophobia and racism. Racism, as we know, is contrary to our dignity as sons and daughters of God and no one should endure the exclusion, fear, helplessness and anxiety that comes about from the hatred born in the heart for those we encounter who are different from us. It matters not how different; every person is a child of God. It makes no difference what they believe or practice, from where they come, or what is the color of their skin, each child of God should be treated with dignity and respect.

Sadly, we are all witness to growing division, hate and scapegoating against Asians and people of Asian descent across the country. According to a recent study, hate crimes against members of the Asian-American community rose nearly 150 percent between 2019 and 2020. Increased reports have documented intensifying physical violence, verbal harassment, shunning and discrimination against Asian-Americans and other racial and ethnic groups.

In response to this hatred and violence, we must earnestly continue to turn to the Lord in prayer, as we did last summer when we joined together each week in June, the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for the diocesan prayer services for racial harmony, peace, justice and healing in our nation. At its foundation, racism is a spiritual problem. We cannot overcome it by our own determination alone, as what is required for real change in society is a change of the human heart, which comes about through God's grace.

Our diocese is blessed to have a wonderful diversity of ethnicities, cultures and languages, among them the Asian-American community, which is served by six of our ten multicultural apostolates. I ask you to join me in praying for all those suffering from racial prejudice, discrimination and inequality. United as one diocesan family and, even more broadly, united as brothers and sisters in one human family, we must address the sin of racism, looking to God first for assistance and then looking into our own hearts.

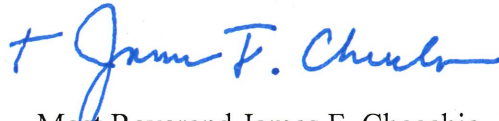
As we prepare to enter into these holiest of days, following Christ on the path to Calvary, we are reminded that we each have a cross to bear. Perhaps the cross you carry is one of struggling for racial harmony, peace, justice and healing; perhaps the cross you carry is one of indifference, leaving those facing inequality to struggle alone; or perhaps the cross you carry is one of struggling to fully love your brothers and sisters as God intended. May this holy season inspire and transform each of us to greater fidelity, courage and love.

I take this opportunity to express prayerful solidarity with all who have endured the scourge of racism, especially, in this moment of history, our Asian-American brothers and sisters; be sure of my spiritual closeness. We are united with you and grateful for the strength that comes to us from our belief in Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from Christ nor extinguish the true hope and joy He gives to us by the triumph of the cross.

Please know of my love and concern for all of you and your families. May we be granted the grace to see our world with eyes of faith and to see each other as God sees us: children of the One Father, equally made in His image and likeness.

With renewed best wishes, I remain

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA  
Bishop of Metuchen