



**Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy**

Day of Prayer and Penance for Peace in the United States of America

**Homily of The Most Reverend William E. Lori, KC*HS
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The Importance of Praying for Unity and Peace

In times of tragedy and upheaval, religious leaders often call for solidarity and prayer. We might think that, amid the turmoil, such appeals would be welcome. Increasingly, however, people say that prayer is ineffectual, even useless.

For example, when I first learned that rioters had stormed the Capitol building, I immediately issued a statement appealing to people of good will to pray for a restoration of calm and for the healing of our fractured unity. But for some, prayers for healing and peace were thought to be a cop-out. Instead, they expressed disappointment that I did not promptly enter the fray, speaking in tones more like those of the news media or politicians. An appeal to people of good will? Prayers for unity and peace? “How bland can you be?” someone asked me.

But I’m not budging.

I am appealing to people of good will: let us indeed pray for unity and peace. There is no doubt our nation is in deep trouble. Doubtless, there is a lot of blame to go around for the violence that occurred last week in our nation’s capital and for the violence that swept our nation during the year just past. In our culture, there are many voices, on all sides of the partisan divide, stoking fires of anger and division, and drowning out voices of faith, reason and compassion.

Today's reading from the Letter to the Hebrews applies to our current situation: We have no peace because "we are not united in faith to those who listened" ... that is, with those who have listened discerningly to the Word of God, and to those who have responded to God's Word prayerfully, in word and in deed.

Jesus Can Overcome Our Paralysis

The Gospel reading from St. Mark portrays the healing of the paralyzed man. This particular person was immobile and completely dependent upon others. Like many others in Capernaum, the paralytic learned about Jesus but could not reach him on his own – because of his immobility and the crowds.

St. Mark tells us that four men (whose names are lost to history) brought him to Jesus. And it wasn't easy. They had to open up the roof and lower him to the feet of Jesus. Seeing their faith, he said to the paralyzed individual, "Child, your sins are forgiven." Notice that Jesus did not say, "Rise, pick up your mat and walk" but rather, "Your sins are forgiven" – controversial words, then and now.

What, then, does this Gospel episode say to us in these turbulent days? Perhaps we can see in the paralyzed individual an image of our country which is immobilized by anger, fear and partisan and ideological division. What, then, are we to do?

Like Those Who Brought the Paralytic to Jesus

To answer that, let us turn our attention to those who brought the paralytic to Jesus. We do not know their names but we know they were persons of deep faith; otherwise they would not have gone to such great lengths to bring this man to Jesus. I'd suggest that we – believing practicing Catholics and others of good will – are like the four men in the Gospel who brought the paralytic to Jesus. Through our prayers, our good example and our reasoned and compassionate involvement, we need to bring our country to the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, healing and renewal.

This is not about crossing church-state lines or making our country a theocracy. It is all about fulfilling our role as believers and as citizens in bringing to bear on our nation the authentic values of the Gospel and the healing that flows from Jesus and his kingdom of justice, love, and peace.

Following Pope Francis' lead, let us seek to replace a culture of anger and division with a culture of care and compassion, especially for those most in need.

Doing this is not easy and few will praise us for it. Like the four men in the Gospel who had to cut through the roof to lower the paralytic, so too we will have to cut thru layers of hatred, ideology and division so that we might lay our country before the feet of Jesus, the Good Shepherd for healing and reconciliation.

Just as the crowd criticized the four men for their boldness in getting close to Jesus, so too many will criticize us if we are bold enough to suggest that we come before the Lord as a nation in a spirit of repentance.

As noted earlier, the names of the four men have been lost to history. Just so, we are doing this not to grab a headline but only out of true love of country. And like the four men, we are people of faith; we are confident that Jesus, who made 'peace by the blood of his cross', can heal us – not with policy or legislative prescriptions – important as these are – but with that 'peace the world cannot give.'

As we begin a weekend in celebration of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy, let us resolve, as never before, to walk the challenging road of non-violence. Let us resolve to walk humbly with our God so that, we will attain the humility we need to serve one another, to renounce violence, to lower our voices, to listen to one another, to respect one another's rights and opinions, including those views that are currently not fashionable – and to seek and find common ground in God's law of love and in the democratic form of government of which we are the heirs.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!