



Presiding Bishop George Lucey on the Murder of George Floyd

30 May 2020
Solemnity of Pentecost

In the name + of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

"I can't breathe." So gasped George Floyd shortly before he was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer last Monday. "I can't breathe."

This isn't the first time an African American man has uttered these terrible words. Six years ago, Eric Garner said the same thing as he was throttled to death by New York City police on Staten Island.

Today the Church celebrates Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit. I've always been struck by the fact that in both Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Bible, the word for spirit also can be translated as "breath" and "wind." God's spirit or wind breathes order upon the chaotic void. (Gen 1:2) God breathes life into the primordial couple. (Gen 2:7) The prophet Ezekiel tells us that God's breath or spirit reanimates dry bones. (Ezekiel 37:5) And at Pentecost, the Risen Lord breathes the Holy Spirit into humanity. (John 20:22)

Breath is life, spirit, vitality, the living presence of God. To rob another person of it is a horrible offense against both the God who lovingly breathes us into existence and the mortals whose God-given breath our hatred stifles.

Racial violence, inflicted on George Floyd, Eric Garner, Sandra Blands, Breonna Taylor, and countless other African American men, women, and children, is just such an offense.

As Christians, you and I are called to honor the Spirit of God and the vitality of life in our sisters and brothers without exception. We cannot do that if we turn a blind eye to the institutional racism that infects our culture, much less the racial prejudice which we ourselves may be harboring, perhaps without even being consciously aware of doing so. We cannot do that unless we confess our guilt, repent of it, and work to make sure that public policies and our own behavior change so that equal protection of the law is truly practiced and enforced no matter the color of skin. Only in this way can we live in a society where all people can live without fear of the breath of life being throttled from them, whether physically, economically or through other structures, institutions and agencies of our society.

My sisters and brothers and people of good will everywhere: I ask you to join me in prayerful contrition for our complicity in the racial violence, which burdens this nation. I ask you to prayerfully, stalwartly, compassionately, and nonviolently witness for justice and stand against the bigotry institutionalized in too many of our legal, economic, and social structures.

In doing so, we honor God's spirit, breath, life. In doing so, we truly celebrate Pentecost.

The Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM
Presiding Bishop