



# Day 6 – Effects of Racial Discrimination on Mental Health

## *Pray*

St. Martin de Porres (1579 – 1639, Peru), born Juan Martin de Porres Velazquez, grew up in poverty and experienced stigma and intergenerational trauma most of his life because of the circumstances of his birth. St. Martin's mother was a freed woman of African descent from Panama, and his father, a Spanish nobleman, abandoned St. Martin and his sister for many years. St. Martin was publicly disparaged because of his mixed heritage. Despite the suffering he endured, St. Martin devoted himself to the poor and vulnerable. Filled with God's love, he is said to have experienced ecstasies and bilocation. Pope Gregory XVI beatified St. Martin in 1837, and St. John XXIII canonized him in 1962.



*Most gracious and loving God, help me to understand better the sin of racial injustice.*

*Help me to examine my own biases and prejudices first.*

*I pray for humility and generosity of spirit to recognize that we are all wonderfully made; the differences in skin color, language, and traditions are the artistry of your love.*

*I pray to live as St. Martin de Porres – he challenges me to rise above my ego, and to live the two main principles of your commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. In Jesus' name, I profess the inherent dignity of every person.*

*St. Martin de Porres, pray for us.*





## **Learn**

As the bishops have written in the pastoral letter *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love (OWOH)*:

*Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. . . . Racism shares in the same evil that moved Cain to kill his brother. It arises from suppressing the truth that his brother Abel was also created in the image of God, a human equal to himself. Every racist act—every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin—is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God. In these and in many other such acts, the sin of racism persists in our lives, in our country, and in our world.” (OWOH p. 1-2)*

To confront racism and pursue justice “requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us” and “a determined effort, but even more so, it requires humility.” “[I]t requires each of us to ask for the grace needed to overcome this sin and get rid of this scourge.” (OWOH, p. 7)

It is important to recognize that [racial discrimination is associated with negative mental health outcomes](#). Racial

discrimination can take a toll on all of us, but the mental health impacts of racial discrimination can be especially devastating for children and adolescents, potentially impacting future experiences. Further, although all demographics have barriers to accessing mental health treatment, it is important to acknowledge that [there are racial disparities in access to mental health care](#).

## **Act**

We, the Church, must ensure a culture of understanding and responsiveness to the impact of racial discrimination. Healing is not possible without such understanding. As in all cases of discrimination, caregivers must emphasize physical, psychological, and emotional safety, and create opportunities for those impacted by racial discrimination to build or rebuild a sense of peace and stability. Consider expanding your training and other educational materials for adults and youth to include vignettes of real-life situations of racial bias. Routinely review written materials shared in pastoral and educational ministries to reflect the appropriate refinements in language over time. Words are powerful!

Learn more about the Church’s response to racism in the USCCB’s pastoral letter against racism, [Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love](#).