



June 19, 2024

Dear Friends,

Last June, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, the first African American cardinal, presided over a special Mass at Mt. Calvary Catholic Church in Forestville, Md. Addressing his brothers and sisters in Christ, he explained how the Scriptural quotation, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” would have “captured the emotions of those formerly enslaved people in Texas as the words of the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War finally had reached them.”

As we approach Juneteenth this year, I reflected on Cardinal Gregory’s message and how it evokes the joy and triumph of that first freedom day – of a new reality being birthed, the fruition of something formerly seen as unreachable – and also relays how the holiday itself is a testament to the grievous persistence of anti-Black racism – that even as Black Americans were liberated, the news and corrective action were delayed and deferred in reaching all parts of the nation.

As Catholics, we have a responsibility to attend to the realities and legacies of the history of slavery in this country. Over the last year, we have seen new tools and resources to do so as we also wrestle with the role of Jesuit and Catholic institutions in this regard. I am heartened that faculty and staff came together this past year to read *The 272: The Families who were Enslaved and Sold to Build the American Catholic Church*. I am also mindful of the significant work done at Loyola University of Maryland in studying its connections to slavery. Learning the history and being present to both the joys and struggles that the holiday of Juneteenth attests to remains good and vital work.

As we continue to seek full equity and inclusion for Black Americans on our campuses and across our country, we are also mindful that freedom and upholding human dignity remain elusive in many parts of the world. War, which Pope Francis calls “a defeat” for humanity, continues in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza. Violence, persecution, climate crises and extreme poverty continue to force many communities to flee their homes to find safety and refuge. World Refugee Day is also celebrated this week and the University co-sponsors Scranton’s celebration that takes place this Saturday, June 22 from 2-4 pm in Nay Aug Park. Here in Scranton, the community has welcomed Bhutanese, Congolese, Afghans, Ukrainians, Syrians and others who have shown resilience and courage in restarting their lives.

These commemorations – Juneteenth and World Refugee Day – invite us to recommit ourselves to the work of solidarity and accompaniment. We have opportunities to do this each day in how we welcome and treat one another on this campus, in our communities and neighborhoods, and in our country. And so I commend these holidays to your prayer and reflection as we press on in our efforts to advance the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching, especially those that uphold the dignity of the human person and pursuit of the common good.

Thank you for all that you do for our beloved University and enjoy these early days of summer.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph G. Marina, S.J.
President