

10 Principles for an Educational Discussion on Racism

- 1 Pray to the Holy Spirit and invoke His power.** Ask Him to guide your conversations and to open the hearts and minds of your students to bring about true conversion and fruitful discussion.
- 2 Listen intently and openly** to your students' experiences and feelings surrounding the issue of racism and acknowledge that they are real (if you feel comfortable, invite students to simply give those emotions to God in the form of a guided meditation). Give students an opportunity to voice discomfort or displeasure with the topic; be mindful of students who are not hurt by racism but for whom the topic may be deeply uncomfortable. Only then can a discussion rooted in reason rather than emotion occur in class.
- 3** Acknowledge that racism is a real problem that has existed throughout the world and continues to exist today. Reflect on the fact that, though it exists throughout the world, racism is a unique problem in the U.S. because our nation was founded on the principle that "all men are created equal." At the same time, the nation did not recognize the dignity of every person by allowing slavery, segregation, and codified discrimination. Even though these are no longer laws of the land, **we can feel their effects.**
- 4** Acknowledge that **members of the Church have frequently failed to live up to her teaching** and committed the sin of racism. Recognize that the tensions and the failures will be different in different communities.
- 5** Emphasize **the inherent dignity of every human being.** Each person is an unrepeatable individual who should be acknowledged as a person with gifts and talents from God, rather than viewed primarily as a member of a group.
- 6** When discussing racism in society and structures of sin, encourage discussion based on data. **Avoid generalization or vague statements;** beware of the common cognitive bias of seeking single causes for complex issues.
- 7** Establish that **personal conversion is necessary** to overcome racism. Since society is made of individuals, the only way to achieve lasting societal conversion is by changing individual hearts.
- 8** Emphasize that Christians are called to offer mercy and forgiveness. Righteous indignation is good and helps us seek justice, but we must try to **assume best intentions in others** and recall that rash judgment is a sin.

9 **Avoid shame-based approaches to addressing the issue of racism.** Only then can people move to a place of conversion and healing. The way we discuss the sin of racism and respond to it must be rooted in the Gospel message and reflect Christian virtue, which is often contrary to the current fads of mainstream culture and popular social theories.

10 **This issue is not “too big” for Jesus.** In fact, He is the only answer to this problem. He offers us the graces we need to overcome sin.