

Pastoral Reflection
The Feast of Body and Blood of Christ
June 19, 2022

My reflection connects this feast day, Corpus Christi, which falls on June 19th this year, with Juneteenth and how I'm thinking a lot about the incongruence of the U.S. Catholic Church's reverence of the body of Christ and its mistreatment of African American bodies through slavery, Jim Crow and the white supremacy still present in its body.

I'm sitting in the offices of Pax Christi USA in Washington, D.C. My office window faces the Catholic University of America (CUA) across the street. Earlier this year, CUA displayed an icon, an African American Pietà depicting Mary and Jesus created by Kelly Latimore in response to the murder of George Floyd. Twice it was stolen in shameful acts of cowardice and racist intimidation.

Two of our staff members, with the permission of the artist, printed a larger version of the icon and mounted it inside my window, prominently facing CUA's campus. As we celebrate the body of Christ today, I'm reminded of that image and the substitution of George Floyd's body for the body of Christ in the traditional Pietà.

"Representations of Mary and Jesus as African Americans are a gift to our faith and a representation of its universality. Icons and imagery reflecting African American spirituality declare who we are and whose we are," Charlene Howard, Pax Christi USA's National Council Chair stated when we posted the display. "This sacred art acknowledges that God loves us and understands what we go through. Most importantly, it reminds all God's people that people of African descent reflect the justice-seeking image and likeness of God."

For me as a white Catholic, the celebration of this feast day, Corpus Christi/Juneteenth, is empty without acknowledgment of the racism that has disfigured the Church and a commitment to be accountable to my sisters and brothers of color. There can be no authentic reverence of the body of Christ until we revere the bodies of Black and Brown people in our Church and society as well.

Johnny Zokovitch