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CNS documentary service

Let the Church Roll On

Bishop Cheri III, OFM

"The Catholic Church has a knee on the neck of Black people and people of color," New Orleans Auxiliary Bishop Fernand Cheri III said in a keynote address to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men National Assembly, held online due to the coronavirus pandemic. Bishop Cheri spoke emphatically on racial justice and the church's failings under the theme "Repentance and Reconciliation: Taking Action to Transform the World," on the first day of the Aug. 4-5 assembly. He began by speaking of a prayer protest rally held in the Archdiocese of New Orleans June 5, after the death of George Floyd. About 300 people attended, and Bishop Cheri said he gave a "Requiem for Black Children of God," remembering 47 Black men and women

"The church has taken to the streets; do we join them in solidarity or do we hold them in contempt?"

killed in recent years in the United States by police violence. In 1968, Bishop Cheri noted, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus declared, "The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primary to white society and is definitely a part of that society." Today "the church is in the same place, the same space, with new faces," he said, adding that churches by their silence or inaction, sanction systemic racism and violence. Yet the body of Christ, "the people," have "taken to the streets" and are calling to church leaders to join them. "Stand up, confess your complicity with systemic racism. Speak up about your conversion, your repentance. Offer restoration and reparation. The church on the streets is calling you," he exhorted. Bishop Cheri suggested ways to "go beyond the Black Lives Matter movement itself and capture and claim the rallying cry of the streets." His address follows.

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On June 5, 2020, the Archdiocese of New Orleans held a prayer protest rally from its chancery office to the front steps of Notre Dame Seminary. The idea was suggested by chancery officials who wanted to publicly do something in response to the death of George Floyd. Instead of a public rosary with 8 minutes, 46 seconds of silence (to commemorate the length of time that officer Derek Chauvin had his knee on Floyd's

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August 27, 2020
Volume 50
Number 14