Statement of Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, on the Racist mass shooting in Buffalo, NY

May 16, 2022

On Saturday, May 14, a gunman used an AR-15, high-capacity assault weapon to murder 10 Black Americans at a Buffalo grocery store, wounding two bystanders. Many of his victims were near or beyond retirement age, including Pearl Young, 77, a grandmother of eight who taught Sunday school, and Katherine Massey, 72, a civil-rights advocate who had written in favor of stronger gun-safety laws. Civil authorities say the 18-year-old suspect traveled hours to carry out his rampage, apparently leaving behind a manifesto filled with white supremacist ideology, including the vile conspiracy theory that people of color are “replacing” white Americans.

In 2019, a gunman who shot up a Walmart in Texas wrote a similar manifesto that referred to the same conspiracy theory, complaining of a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.” Whatever the theory, white supremacism is a lie. This ideology is not always so explicitly expressed, but it is condemnable whether it hides behind slippery political rhetoric or does not bother with any fig leaves of deniability.

We must pray for the victims of this outrageous act. We must keep them in our thoughts. But that is not all we are obliged to do. As Christians, we are called to be our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Part of that obligation entails being witnesses to truth. When this chapter of American history is written, what will our grandchildren say about what we did to protect the marginalized? What will they say about how we responded to a culture that became increasingly tolerant of rhetoric that demonizes our fellow human beings on the basis of their race or ethnicity or religion or sex? Will they wonder how we could have become inured to daily gun violence and mass shootings, how our consciences were numbed to the consequences of violence-inspiring rhetoric? Will they wonder at our failure to stop dangerous people from procuring assault weapons, including children, or our failure to see how social media is being used to rend the social fabric? What will they think about how we responded to a moment in which a Black American, indeed any person of color, is forced by the scourge of racism to live in fear?

These questions should preoccupy our minds as we stand at this cultural crossroads. We need not choose the path of indifference. We can choose to listen to the suffering of our brothers and sisters who suffer racism in all its forms — and then act to build a more just society. We can choose to face the challenge of gun violence, including that which occurs daily in the Chicago area, by enacting common-sense federal safety laws that help keep firearms out of the hands of irresponsible people and end the flow of firearms across state borders.

We can choose to take the path of love and see in our neighbors the face of Christ. We Christians can choose to act as though we actually believe that we, indeed all human beings, are made in God’s image.

It is in this spirit of family that we must stand in solidarity with the victims of the Buffalo massacre, with the victims of gun violence here in Chicago and across the nation, with victims’ loved ones, indeed with all people who face the threat of racism every day, holding fast to the knowledge that we are beloved by God, not because of how we look or where we or our ancestors were born, but because we are of God, made in his image, and directed toward love.