

My dearest brothers and sisters,

It is a joy and an honor to welcome you to the historic San Fernando Cathedral for this annual event honoring the memory and work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This year is a special year as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of his passing away, martyred for his faith and commitment to non-violence, by the hand of the very violence he opposed. Although the memory of his death evokes feelings of sadness and fear within us, yet at the same time it strengthens our resolve to keep his dream alive, and to work for a more just and inclusive society. Blessed Pope Paul VI, the Holy Father of the Catholic Church in the days when Dr. King was killed, said these words: “If you want peace, work for justice.” Those words of Blessed Paul VI ring as true today as they did in 1968.

This past April, our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, in a letter to the people of Chicago, said, “I urge all people, especially young men and women, to respond to Dr. King’s prophetic words and know that a ‘culture of nonviolence’ is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results. The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations...”

To create a “culture of non-violence.” — Our calling is no less than this. Fifty years after Dr. King’s death and in the midst of a society soaked in the blood of gun violence, re-emerging racism, intolerance of immigrants, and the dehumanization of common working people, it may seem that this task is too large, too much for us to attain. Yet, during a time with even more pressing circumstances than ours, Dr. King believed that one day we would reach that “Promised Land” where the inherent dignity of each human person would be recognized, and that each person would be judged

by the content of his or her character, and not by the color of his or her skin.

We have a special challenge in San Antonio before us now. As one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the country, and with a rich and diverse history, we can help to forge the future and create that “culture of non-violence.” Our annual remembrance of Dr. King, both in this inter-faith prayer service and in the annual march, is an important sign of our potential as a community in San Antonio. Yet our work is not done, for we live now in a city and community not so much divided by race, as divided by economy, with a vast separation of the rich and the poor. If we want peace, we must work for justice. The justice of God is not the justice of retribution, but the justice of reparation and restoration. Let us set ourselves, then, to this task — together.

Let us pray:

O God, source of every grace and blessing, creator of our world and of the human person in your own image and likeness, grant that we may have hearts of love for one another. Help us to truly see in the eyes of each person we meet, the eyes of our brother or sister, sharing the same gift of humanity you have given to each one of us. In the life and ministry of Jesus, you have shown us the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus, too, was killed by the violence of this world — a world he had entered as the Prince of Peace. Help us, by your grace, to create a “culture of non-violence,” by loving each person as our own true brother or sister; a fellow child of God. Through our remembrance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reinvigorate our commitment to the task of making the world more just, for in your justice, we shall come to know peace. Amen.