



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
Rev. Richard C. Hermes, S.J.

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Dear Jesuit Students,

I want to offer you a personal reflection and some guidance to help you understand and face the many challenges of this present moment in our country. The responsibility and mission of the school is to assist your parents in your education, which includes your religious and moral formation. An important aspect of that is how you think and act as young citizens, who are first and foremost disciples of Christ, in the midst of public controversies.

The initial, and key, point I want to emphasize is what we have in common as children of God. We share a common humanity that is more important than all our differences. Moreover, each and every one of us shares the dignity that belongs to all human beings, a dignity rooted in our human nature. Every one of us is created by God to know, love, and serve Him as our Creator, and to love and honor one another out of love for Him. This really is bedrock ground. It is fundamental to all our political and moral judgments and actions. Our common humanity is the foundation of all the rights we enjoy, the duties we owe one another, and the possibility of living together peacefully and happily in society. Furthermore, our common humanity is the unshakeable basis for our opposition to racism and racial injustice, and every injustice that people suffer.

The revulsion that we all justifiably feel at the death of George Floyd is because he was a human being, made in the image and likeness of God, who had the right to life and the right to justice that all human beings have. These are inalienable rights that no civil power and no officer of the law can snatch away. These rights are rooted in the dignity of our human nature, and they are rights that every man, woman, and child should enjoy. Human dignity is not the result of money, power, race, sex, age, or any other secondary aspect of human life. It comes from God. It's how He made us. I pray, and hope you join me in praying, that the family of George Floyd somehow finds consolation in their suffering and that they receive justice through our courts of law.

As you know, our constitutional tradition puts a very high value on the right of assembly and the right to free speech. Many other nations and political systems do not honor these precious rights as highly as we do in America. Those who feel moved to gather together and make their voices heard in public protest have every right to do so. In doing so peacefully and in accord with the law, they honor some of our oldest traditions as a nation. Even if you disagree with the point of a public protest, it is important to realize how deeply American such demonstrations are.

When certain groups and individuals use otherwise peaceful protests and legitimate demonstrations to inflict violence on people and property, three things happen: they do damage to our tradition of free expression; they distort the good intentions of the great majority of people of all races and backgrounds seeking to make their voices heard in a peaceful way; and, quite often, they do grave harm to the very communities that are most vulnerable to wanton acts of destruction and least able to recover from them. In a law-governed democracy, it matters enormously how we go about righting wrongs and fighting evil. Good and just means must always be chosen in the defense of justice. The great British historian, Christopher Dawson, put it this way, "As soon as men decide that all means are permitted to fight an evil, then their good becomes indistinguishable from the evil they set out to destroy."

As you navigate through these currents that will partly define your experience as young men and as Jesuit students, I strongly encourage you to be men of reasoned convictions. Always strive to illuminate and not to inflame political conversations. Learn to offer to others your own well-considered convictions, and then give them the courtesy of hearing their views, respectfully and without prejudice. Social media is a very poor and often dangerous format for healthy dialogue. Do not indulge, as so many do, in the name-calling, defamation, mockery, and cynicism that is all too common on social media and elsewhere in our current landscape. As this crisis has illustrated just how destructive social media can be, you might do well to consider a summer long "fast" from your use of social media.

In your discussions with your friends and others, rely on the resources of your Jesuit education and be men of thoughtful and charitable dialogue. To do so, you have to resist the temptation to be impulsive and to react immediately to everyone and everything. You have to rise above the vulgarity of what everybody else is saying and how they are saying it. Instead, remember that you are men of God, disciples of Jesus Christ, and sons of St. Ignatius, men who have learned to embrace not falsehood and division, but truth and reconciliation.

Please know that you, and the whole Jesuit community, are in my prayers each and every day.

In the Risen Christ,

Richard C. Hermes, S.J.

Fr. Hermes