

Bishop urges blacks to 'shout about' racism

By Julie Asher
Catholic News Service

NEW ORLEANS — The Rodney King affair left some people tired of hearing about racism and victimization, but "we must talk about it, shout about it, write about it, and chart out a course to annihilate" it, said Auxiliary Bishop Joseph A. Francis of Newark, N.J., July 9.

"When we leave here, we leave with a more focused agenda to keep on keeping on," Bishop Francis told about 3,000 people gathered for the opening Mass of the seventh National Black Catholic Congress, held July 9-12 in New Orleans.

Clad in vestments made of African kente cloth, the bishop was homilist for a Mass that also drew about 90 bishops to the city's convention center, including nine of the nation's 11 active black bishops.

Auxiliary Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Chicago was the principal celebrant.

Bishop Francis opened his homily by recalling a conversation he had 29 years ago. He was asked by an Irish priest friend when U.S. black Catholics would produce an agenda for themselves.

At the time "we had just begun to make noise to be heard," he said. Years later, with the seventh congress beginning, "it's obvious we've got the attention of a lot of the hierarchy," he said, referring to the bishops at the Mass.

"The last 29 years we've been on a roller coaster. The journey at times has been exciting, frustrating, nonetheless courageous as we challenged the church to hear us."

But for what small gains have been made, he said, he still wonders "if the words are falling on deaf ears or if the

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— Bishop Joseph A. Francis

tiny mustard seeds have taken hold.

"... Tonight we are well on our way on the journey that began far back in the 19th century with the first five black congresses," he said.

"We come first and foremost to honor God," Bishop Francis said. "We gather in the spirit of the hymn that says 'Lord help me to hold out, help me to hold out until my change comes,'" he said.

Bishop Francis drew attention to the congress' focus on African-American family life and on the African-American male.

He recalled what Pope John Paul II said about family during his 1985 trip to Kenya, "the motherland."

The pope described the family "as the vital cell of any society," the bishop said. "The vitality of any country is only as great as the vitality of the family in that country."

Bishop Francis noted that "the African-American family has been on the agenda of black Catholics for a long

time," a fact he said was reflected in the 19 public policy and pastoral statements on African-American families presented to delegates to approve during the congress.

The public policy statements covered national family policy, Medicaid, universal health care, welfare reform, job training and opportunity, multicultural curriculums and minority scholarships.

Pastoral statements touched on marriage, laity, children and youth, religious education, Catholic schools, evangelization, pastoral ministry to families and African-American ministries.

As for black males, it seems as though they are under fire from all quarters, Bishop Francis said in his homily. Many in society are prepared, he added, to write them off.

The bishop noted that homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American males aged 15-44.

"When an African-American youth in a large urban area was asked what he hoped for for the future," Bishop Francis said, "he answered simply and honestly, 'I hope I'll still be alive this time next year.'"

He said that many black males are unemployed, homeless and "full of despair" and that their self-esteem has been destroyed by racism, lack of opportunity and "a judicial system that looks the other way."

"From the moment the first black man and woman were taken from their home, the black male became fair game for slave masters," Bishop Francis said. "Over 500 years later nothing has really changed. One has only to look at the horrifying video of Rodney King to realize the whips of slave masters are still at work in the billy clubs of uncaring men and women of the '90s."

He urged the women not to give up on the African-American male. Quoting a song, he said: "Just put your faith in him. With your love their is nothing your man can't do."

"Look around you. This is a congress made up mostly of women," he told those at the Mass. "My sisters, we need you. Please hold on until together we can make our change come."



AP/Wide World Photo
PROTESTER ARRESTED — Baton Rouge police arrest a pro-choice demonstrator Monday, July 6. The demonstrators had gathered in the parking lot of a church in which Operation Rescue activists were meeting to plan the next day's activities. Two pro-life demonstrators were arrested July 9.

Diaconate may be answer for married Czech priests

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Becoming permanent deacons is a possibility for some married men who were secretly ordained during Czechoslovakia's communist rule, said Archbishop Miloslav Vlk of Prague.

Yet another option is working as priests in the Eastern rite, which allows a married priesthood, he said in a July 6 Vatican Radio interview.

The permanent diaconate is a possibility for married men whose ordination is in doubt and who want to work in the Latin rite, the prelate said.

These men would be ordained to the permanent diaconate as a precaution in case they were not validly ordained before, he said.

Married men whose ordinations are in doubt and who wish to work as Eastern-rite priests also would be ordained as a precaution, he added.

There is no general answer to the problem of what to do with doubtful ordinations and solutions are still being studied on a case-by-case basis, he said.

Czechoslovakia has one Eastern-rite and 12 Latin-rite dioceses.

Clandestine ordinations were done as a means of keeping the church alive

under repressive communist rule. Difficulties in confirming the validity of ordinations occur because in many cases no written records were kept and the bishops who performed the ordinations have died.

The diaconate is an ordained ministry preceding ordination to the priesthood. A deacon can perform some sacramental functions, but cannot celebrate Mass or absolve people from sins. The Second Vatican Council encouraged it as a permanent ministry in the Latin-rite for married men.

Archbishop Vlk noted that the number of men saying they were clandestinely ordained totals 18 bishops and about 170 priests.

"Of these priests, a good number are married" and not all of the ordinations are in doubt, he said.

Married men were ordained with the understanding that it was for the Eastern rite, he said.

Other Czechoslovakian church officials have said that at least three of the bishops are married.

Archbishop Vlk said that each man who said he was secretly ordained has presented a written statement to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is overseeing the search for solutions.



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