

Saturday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 1, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 416, "May 13, 1985," pp. 417-418, "A Surname...," pp. 434-440, "Progress (part two)

In chapter seventeen, Ibram X. Kendi describes how deceptive our perception of "progress" can be: "By the 1990s, the gulf between the rhetoric of racial progress and the reality for millions of Black Americans had grown wider, as the former became more and more triumphant. In 1995, four years after the LAPD had brutally beat Rodney King, Dinesh D'Souza, a former Reagan aide, published a book titled *The End of Racism*. This was the year of the O.J. Simpson trial, with its polarizing verdict and revelations of racist LAPD behavior, and the beginning of the apex of Black incarceration rates during the War on Drugs, after Bill Clinton signed the devastatingly punitive 1994 crime bill.... By the century's end, the term 'color-blind' was often being used by politicians and thinkers to describe the correct way to think about race, since so much progress had been achieved.... Black cultures and behaviors were once again being blamed for racial disparities and inequity, while anti-Black racism was exonerated on the altar of racial progress."

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed sepulchers, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and all kinds of filth." (Matthew 23:23-27)

There is much of which we can be proud as Americans, but there is also much of which we must be ashamed. Our society is clean and shiny on the outside and we speak of progress (our ideals), but inside (reality) lie much corruption and injustice, as in the sepulchers of which Jesus spoke. Our society continues to be guilty of massive hypocrisy on racial and economic matters and at the same time to teach that we are getting better. We change the tax code to favor the wealthy, praising new laws as benefiting the middle class. We gerrymander districts so people of color are underrepresented on state and national levels. We change voting days and hours to make it harder for working people. We fight legislation to provide living wages or give employees health benefits. We ban books that might offer students chances to discuss difficult ideas and troubling attitudes in our history. Then we tell ourselves it is "better," that we are moving forward while honoring the values of our founders, as if the world of 1776 is the same as the world of 2023.

Prayer

God of mercy and justice, inspire us to live with our eyes open. Make us strong to bring justice and equality to each other. Help us see with clarity the truth around us, understanding that injustice for one is injustice for all. Give us courage to act when we see injustice, on both the individual and the systemic level. Restore in us a clean heart, O Lord, and put a new and right spirit within us. Amen.