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A file photo of Pope Francis as leads his weekly general audience in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican May 27, 2020. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Rome — June 3, 2020

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Pope Francis expressed concern June 3 about what he termed the "disturbing social unrest" taking place throughout the United States. The pontiff called for the confrontation of racism, but said violence is "self-destructive and self-defeating."

In his weekly live-streamed general audience, the pope directly addressed his "dear brothers and sisters" in the U.S.

Francis said he is following "with great concern the disturbing social unrest in your nation in these past days, following the tragic death of Mr. George Floyd," a 46-year-old African American father who was killed by a Minneapolis police officer May 25.

"My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life," said the pontiff.

"At the same time, we have to recognize that ‘the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating,'" he said, quoting a May 31 statement by Los Angles Archbishop Jose Gomez, president of the U.S. bishops' conference. "'Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost.'"

Francis also said he is praying for the repose of Floyd's soul, and for "all those others who have lost their lives as a result of the sin of racism."

The pontiff's remarks come as dozens of cities across the U.S. continue to experience daily protests over both Floyd's death and the wider treatment of African American people throughout U.S. society.

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The remarks also come a day after many Catholics in the nation's capital expressed disgust over President Donald Trump's June 2 visit to the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington.

They pointed to the president's June 1 decision to clear a crowd of peaceful protestors in front of the White House with rubber bullets and smoke cannisters so he could pose for a photo holding a bible outside St. John's Episcopal Church.

The shrine is operated by the Knights of Columbus. Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory issued a statement sharply criticizing the use of the facility for Trump's visit.

"I find it baffling and reprehensible that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused and manipulated in a fashion that violates our religious principles, which call us to defend the rights of all people even those with whom we might disagree," said Gregory.

St. John Paul II, said the archbishop, would not "condone the use of tear gas and other deterrents to silence, scatter or intimidate them for a photo opportunity in front of a place of worship and peace."

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