News

A black and white photo of a Black woman at a lecturn with one arm raised in the air. She we

Sister Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, is shown during a talk she gave at St. Augustine Church in Washington in 1986. Bowman, who died in 1990, is one of six African American Catholics whose causes for canonization are being considered by the Catholic Church. Her sainthood cause was opened in 2018 and she has the title "Servant of God." (OSV News photo/CNS file, Michael Hoyt, Catholic Standard)



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Catholics "must act" for racial justice, starting with personal conversion, to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle and eliminate racial injustices in society, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stated.

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese of the Military Services in his statement immediately referred to the call to action from Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman, one of six Black Catholic women and men proposed for sainthood.

"People keep saying, 'Where's the next Martin Luther King?' We're all called, I think. We're called by our citizenship, by our membership in the human race. We're all called to free ourselves and to free one another," Bowman said.

Broglio noted that while society has made progress toward "a just society that leaves no one on the margins" in the 60 years since King's "I Have a Dream" speech,

nevertheless "much work remains."

King, whose birthday is Jan. 15 but is celebrated on the following Monday as a federal holiday, led the civil rights movement until his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, April 4, 1968. He was just 39 years old and would have turned 94 this year.

"Beyond remembering and quoting Dr. King today, we must act to address racial disparities in the criminal justice system, access to affordable housing and health care, and economic opportunities," the USCCB president stated.

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He noted the USCCB "continues to support policy changes in these areas of society," and encouraged people to read about the USCCB's policy work and efforts to overcome racism, as well as "ministry resources in working with and for Catholics of African descent."

Broglio pointed out King's faith drove his civil rights work, and Catholics today must undergo conversion and look to the saints to undo unjust structures of racism in society.

"Remembering that Dr. King was guided first by his faith also challenges us to personal conversion. Unjust structures exist because personal sin persists," he said. "As the late Pope Benedict XVI expressed, 'To renew the church in every age, God raises up saints, who themselves have been renewed by God and are in constant contact with God.' For models of lives transformed, we can always turn to the saints."

Broglio highlighted the USCCB's efforts to advance the sainthood causes of "six inspirational African American men and women: Venerable Pierre Toussaint, Servant of God Mother Mary Lange, Venerable Henriette Delille, Venerable Augustus Tolton, Servant of God Julia Greeley, and Sister Thea Bowman."

He said, "May their holy examples convert our hearts and our society, that we may achieve Dr. King's dream of building a society where every person is recognized as a beloved son or daughter of God and treated with the justice and dignity that they deserve."