Spirituality



Jay-Z, left, accepts the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award as daughter Blue Ivy Carter looks on during the 66th annual Grammy Awards Feb. 4 in Los Angeles. (AP photo/Chris Pizzello)



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As Black people, we know the struggles that hit our lives personally much more than many of our fellow brothers and sisters around the world. In America, we are still struggling to achieve true equality and recognition. We have struggled for centuries to prove that we are capable, talented and, in most cases, the brightest ones in the room. Just a couple of weeks ago, we saw this play out at one of the most-watched awards shows in the country.

At the 2024 Grammys, the rapper Jay-Z received the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award for his contributions to the music industry. Surrounded by some of the field's most accomplished and talented artists, he made a statement that shook the entire audience and has been spoken about repeatedly since.

"I don't want to embarrass this young lady, but she has more Grammys than anyone and never won album of the year," he said of his wife, the multi-genre star Beyoncé.

"Even by your own metrics, that doesn't work. Think about that. The most Grammys and never won album of the year. That doesn't work."

As Beyoncé sat in the audience, quietly watching her husband speak the truth, the rest of the Black community and many in the music industry knew it as well. Black people are always working harder and almost never getting the recognition that they deserve.

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This year, as is often the case, Lent began right in the middle of Black History Month. I have always thought this is a beautiful convergence. A time when we prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, mixed in with recognition of the outstanding accomplishments of Black people. Lent has also been a time to devote an extensive amount of time to my relationship with God. Lent asks us two main questions: What

is in the way of your relationship with God? And how can I deepen my relationship with God?

Looking at Jesus' time on Earth, we see the struggle that he had throughout his life. Something I personally believe is that as Black Catholics, we should identify with his pain because he, too, was a brown person meant to make a difference despite opposition. Throughout his life, he took the guidance of God and persevered despite the devil, antagonists, and temptation. He continued to move forward. One of the most beautiful pieces of his story is that he stood strong, knowing that from above, he was anointed and protected no matter what. Our Mass readings during Holy Week show that even when he knew the time was coming for him to be betrayed, he handled it all with grace and stayed consistent.

I do believe the same can be applied to my life and to the rest of the Black diaspora. There have been many times I've been the most educated person in the room but underestimated, had the best idea in a meeting but ignored, or worked for someone not qualified for the job. As great and strong as Black people are, the work to consistently show up, code-switch and strive for perfection becomes entirely taxing for many of us.



Fr. Kareem Smith addresses the congregation during the Archdiocese of New York's annual Black History Month Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral Feb. 4 in New York City. The liturgy also marked the National Day of Prayer for the African American and African Family. At the front of the altar are images of four of six U.S. Black Catholics up for sainthood: Julia Greeley, left, Pierre Toussaint, Sr. Thea Bowman and Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

When I was deep in the struggle, my previous pastor told me to look to the Black Catholics on their way to sainthood for inspiration. I pray that they continue to give me guidance as I continue to fight for that recognition and change they so graciously sought in their own lives.

In his speech this month, Jay-Z offered his own advice: "In life, you gotta keep showing up. Just keep showing up. Forget the Grammys. You gotta keep showing up until they give you all those accolades you feel you deserve."

Indeed, it is my hope that this Lenten season, we Black Catholics will recognize that in spite of the injustices and odds against us and the standard of perfection often required of us, we will prevail just as Jesus did.