

Litany: Remembering Those Who Prepared the Land and Those Who Grew the Movement

*“We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls
and our heart is filled with faces and names!”*

- Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, Evangelii Gaudium, #274

Leader: May Peace which passes all understanding be with you!

All: And also with you.

Leader: As we celebrate African American History Month, it is important to give thought to some of those committed to bringing a greater measure of justice to this nation. In all struggles for justice, some names are imprinted upon our memories. They are the heroes of the history books, the ones we venerate. Say the words, “Civil Rights Movement,” and for many, if not most, Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. immediately come to mind: she, who would not get give up her seat, and he, the leader of marches and expressions of solidarity. Rosa Parks was far more than an occupant of a forbidden seat, just as Dr. King was far more than a leader of marches and a speaker of stirring words. They were all this and so much more. Their acts and words captured a nation’s attention. They suggested to the rest of us a moral compass, which was expected to serve as a guide in our relations with one another.

During our time together, we will focus not on heroes familiar to all, but on those who, although far less known, also committed their lives to justice and systemic change. Despite their significance, these names may now be receding into the shadows of history.



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/1vEs3lh>

But, history, we know, is not made solely by great figures. Thus, we must recognize that there are women and men, whose actions prepared the soil for the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, whose writings sensitized us to institutional injustice, as well as those who rose under the inspirations of the movement. Had they not been steadfast in their beliefs and dreams, the land would not have been readied for those like Rosa Parks, Dr. King, and those of us who work in the fields of justice today.

Reader 1: The haunting question posed by Langston Hughes in his poem, *Harlem*:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Source: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175884>



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/1ls2bcX>

For those who were in the struggle of the early days, the movement evolved in strength and focus. But for the nation it seemed to explode in ways that awakened consciousness that all must be allowed to drink from the same cup of dignity and justice.

Reader 2: We remember Diane Nash, a leader and strategist of the student wing of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. In February 1961, she served jail time in solidarity with the “Rock Hill Nine,” nine students imprisoned after a lunch counter sit-in.

May we follow her example and stand in solidarity with those who are risking their lives in the cause of justice.

All: God of Solidarity, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 3: We remember James Leonard Farmer, Jr., a civil rights activist who headed the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). A devotee of Gandhi’s nonviolent strategies, Farmer organized the historic Freedom Rides of 1961, which led to the desegregation of interstate travel. He was a star college debater before going on to lead CORE, one of the most prominent organizations of the Civil Rights era. Farmer was a conscientious objector during World War II and worked with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the early 1940s.

Through his witness may we recognize pathways to justice that we, too, may follow and may we explore ways of resolving conflict through nonviolence and reconciliation.

All: God of Peace and Reconciliation, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 4: We remember Claudette Colvin, a pioneer of the African-American Civil Rights Movement. At the age of 15, on March 2, 1955, she became the first person arrested for resisting bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, preceding the more-publicized Rosa Parks incident by nine months. Claudette was the first to really challenge the law.

May we muster the courage to challenge any law that disrespects the dignity of others and may we have the courage to knock on the consciences of our leaders demanding laws that protect the human rights of all peoples.



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/1IESez4>

All: God, Spirit of Promise, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 5: We remember **Jimmie Lee Jackson**, an activist who participated in a voter registration march. He was shot and killed by an Alabama state trooper on February of 1965. His death set in motion a train of events that stirred a lethargic nation and compelled once-reluctant politicians to use the power of federal law to ensure that every adult citizen had a right to register and vote.

Through his witness and that of others who sacrificed their lives in the cause of equality for all Americans, may we dare to stand in defense of equal rights for all, regardless of the cost.

All: God our Comforter, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 6: We remember the courageous activist and organizer **Ruby Doris Smith Robinson**. She joined the Civil Rights Movement in 1960 as a young Spelman College coed and played a critical role in the development and evolution of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). She remained a committed activist until her death in 1967.

Through her witness, may we learn from her example the importance of our commitment to justice each day, for none of us knows how many days have been allotted to us; and may we learn that doing the hard work behind the scenes for justice is as important as standing in television's glare.

All: God of Hope, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.



Reader 7: We remember **Ralph David Abernathy**, a minister and close associate of Martin Luther King, Jr., in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He was arrested with Dr. King 17 times and was always by King's side, including when the civil rights leader was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Abernathy worked to keep Dr. King's spirit alive and became president of the SCLC. He also spearheaded the Poor People's Campaign of 1968, which included a march on Washington that led to the creation of the Federal Food Stamps Program.

Through his witness, may we recognize that racism and poverty are inexorably linked and may we find the courage to rid our communities of these institutional faces of sin.

All: God, Author of Equality, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 8: We remember **Ruby Nell Bridges Hall**, an activist known for being the first black child to attend an all-white elementary school on November 14, 1960 at William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

With Ruby, may we come to recognize "racism as a grown-up disease and work to stop using children to spread it."



Painting by Norman Rockwell: This painting depicts the day of November 14, 1960 on Ruby Bridges' first day at William Frantz, Elementary school in New Orleans. Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/14QFCYF>

All: God, Strength of the Oppressed, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 9: We remember **Stokely Carmichael**, also known as Kwame Ture, a Trinidadian-American activist best known for leading the civil rights group, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s. He was an inspired speaker, effective organizer, and expansive thinker. The greeting with which he answered his telephone until his dying day best captures his tireless spirit and radical outlook: "Ready for the revolution!"

Through his witness, may we welcome each day as an opportunity to replace an act of injustice with an act of justice, compassion, and goodness.

All: God of Peaceful Revolutions, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.



Reader 10: We remember **Fanny Lou Hamer**, a voting rights activist and civil rights leader who was instrumental in organizing the Mississippi Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). She co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Through her witness, may we never tire of the struggle to rid our world of racial inequality and may we speak out when we see others being mistreated because of their skin color, gender, faith, and sexual orientation.



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/1lICToP>

All: God of Nonviolent Struggles, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 11: We remember **James Meredith**, a civil rights activist and the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi. On June 6, he embarked on what was to be a solitary “Walk Against Fear” from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, in an attempt to encourage voter registration by African Americans in the South. About 20 miles into Mississippi, Meredith was shot by a sniper and wounded too severely to continue. Other civil rights leaders, including Dr. King and Stokely Carmichael, arrived to continue the march on his behalf. Meredith later recovered and rejoined the march he had originated, and on June 26 the marchers successfully reached Jackson, Mississippi.



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/1BZMo95>

Through his witness, may we find creative and nonviolent ways to promote justice and equality in a world where injustice seems more common than the justice for which we long.

All: Life-Giving God, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 12: We remember Dr. Gwendolyn Patton, who has been described as a “scholar activist” and who urged her students to work in the community for social, political, and economic change. She was involved in the voting rights movement and founded the National Anti-War Anti-Draft Union against the war in Vietnam in 1969.

Through her witness, may teachers instruct their students to see the beauty of justice in action and not simply as words on a printed page.



Reader 13: We remember **Langston Hughes**, poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called jazz poetry.

Through his witness, may we muster the courage to allow “our souls to grow deep into the rivers” of justice and to return refreshed and prepared to work collectively in creating a world in which all will be free.

All: God of Poets, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Reader 14: We remember **Sister Thea Bowman**, a scholar, gifted with a beautiful singing voice, who “danced her faith, always with joy.” She helped others to recognize the gifts that African-American Catholics bring to the Church and spoke to bishops about how the Church needed to be more welcoming to them.

Through her witness, may we renew our commitment to break down walls of prejudice, suspicion, and hatred that drive people apart.

All: God of Vision, inspire us to be your vessels of change and to break down walls of racism and inequality.

Closing Song : “Oh, Freedom!”

Refrain: Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me
And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free

No more weepin, no more weepin, no more weepin over me
And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free

Refrain: Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me
And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free

There’ll be singin, there’ll be singin, there’ll singin over me
And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free

Refrain: Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me
And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVCYrBw-AE>)



Photo Credit: <http://bit.ly/14riwHq>