



Statement for Observance of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles and president of USCCB

January 15, 2021

For much of the past year, America has been reckoning with the legacy of slavery and the persistence of racial injustice in our country. Sadly, it is still true that the “color of our skin” often matters more in our society than the “content of our character,” as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., said a half-century ago.

This year as we commemorate the legacy of this great American, we remember especially Rev. King’s belief in nonviolence and the power of love.

As we witnessed in the violence in our cities last summer and in the violence that broke out again last week at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., our country has become too angry, too bitter, and too divided.

And as we confront our deep divisions, we face the same choices that Rev. King and the civil rights movement faced. For us, too, the question is how will we struggle against the injustices in our society, what means will we use?

In 1958, Rev. King wrote: “Along the way of life, someone must have the sense enough and the morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethics of love to the center of our lives.” This is the challenge for every one of us who believes in the promise of America and seeks to renew the soul of this great nation.

In the spirit of Rev. King, we must meet the forces of hate and ignorance with the power of love. We must learn again the wisdom of the Gospel and love our enemies and bless those who oppose us. In this moment, Rev. King would counsel everyone in public life to seek reconciliation and reject the easy temptation to reprisals and recrimination. We do not love those who oppose us because they are loveable, or even likable, Rev. King once said. We love them because God loves them. And by our love, we seek their conversion and friendship, not their humiliation. This is our Christian duty in this moment — to be healers and peacemakers, to overcome evil and lies, not by more of the same, but with words of truth and works of love.

We ask our Blessed Mother Mary, the Queen of Peace, to guide us in this moment of transition and uncertainty in our country. May she help us to keep believing in the power of love.