

## Recalling History: A Letter from Bishop Schlert

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**7 July 2020**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over this Independence Day holiday I have been, perhaps like you, praying for and reflecting upon our Country. Certainly, it is difficult to remember a more contentious Fourth of July.

Supposedly, after signing the Declaration of Independence, as Benjamin Franklin was leaving Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia, a woman shouted out, "So Doctor, what do we have? A republic or a monarchy." Franklin replied, "A republic, if you can keep it." We seem to be faced with the "if you can keep it" right now.

The almost ruthless push to erase history flows contrary to what we need as human beings and as a society. To eradicate our history -- the good, the bad, and the shameful aspects of it -- is to make us orphans. Nothing in Sacred Scripture would ever support the forgetting or destruction of history.

Beginning in the Old Testament, we see the Israelites, God's Chosen People, constantly recalling their history: the wonders God worked for them; the tremendous sins of their past and God's merciful forgiveness. Actually, God demanded that they remember their history. "...you shall teach them (the Commandments) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deuteronomy 6:7)

In the New Testament, Jesus is the first proponent of the “cancel culture.” “Cancel” as in “forgiveness.” Through His preaching and death on the Cross, He canceled our sins out of love. He forgives our sins, but does not wipe away the memory of them.

Just as Israel had to remember their sins against God, so too must we remember our personal and collective societal sins. Without this remembrance, there can be no future of avoiding the same behavior.

When the woman was caught in adultery, Jesus did not condemn her. Instead, He forgave her, and told her “Go, and do not sin again.” (John 8:11) Jesus wanted her to remember her sin -- not to erase her past -- so she could remember to avoid it in the future.

There is a great movement currently in our Nation that our past is hurtful and needs to be expunged. This would be contrary to Divine Revelation. Jesus teaches us that the best, most healing way to deal with the past is through forgiveness, not forgetfulness. The healing of our souls and the healing of our Nation can only come by recognizing our past, seeking forgiveness for it, and remembering it, lest we commit the same offenses today. Moral and historical amnesia is dangerous for us in the present and perilous for those who come after us, for without reminders of the journey our Country has taken, our heirs will have to retrace the same sad steps. A little present-day humility is in order here. As we watch statues of historical figures decapitated and broken because of the times in which they lived, how do we suppose future generations will judge us as a society that kills our children in the name of personal freedom as we worship at the monument of abortion?

Destroying statues of Saint Junipero Serra, the Founding Fathers, and Christopher Columbus is not a rational response that reaches to the depths of hearts, nor does it solve any of our national problems. Only by recalling the past, with all its sins and blemishes, and seeking reconciliation with it will we be a great people “whose God is the Lord.”

Please be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones. As a Diocesan Family of Faith, may we be conduits of peace in our enraged land.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert  
Bishop of Allentown

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