

## **An Open Letter from the Passionists to George Floyd, deceased.**

Dear George,

On behalf of the Passionist community of the Province of St. Paul of the Cross, I want to offer our condolences. No doubt you are in a better place, as we like to say, but I am sure you would have liked more years to enjoy your God given life. More years to explore the mystery of who God created you to be. More years to love your daughter. We are so sorry that your life ended under the unyielding pressure of a grinding knee of a police officer - who represents our 'system'.

George, we are a religious community that is committed to remembering what was done to Jesus by the authorities of his day. We take a sacred vow to carry the memory of the willful crucifixion of Jesus by those who had the power to do it. They strategically chose to murder him and used the weapons of the state to carry out their goal of violent coercion to silence the voice and vision of the Just One. Some murdered him, George, but far more just watched or fled.

It's no surprise to you, George, that this 'crucifixion' continues in the countless sisters and brothers throughout the world who continue to have the knees of oppression bear down on them – through systemic injustice, racism, persistent poverty and apathy. They cry out the same desperate lament as you – 'I can't breathe'. We watched the video George – when the knee was hard on your neck – we all had to listen closely to hear your flailing words. I guess that's why they press down so hard – so no one can hear the cries – or at least able to pretend not to.

George, the ending of your life is not the only tragedy. You grew up amidst the landmines of a segregated neighborhood in Houston. Like so many other places like that, the world so often worked against you. The institutions that were meant to serve you– so often did the opposite – whether schools, police, healthcare and, yes, even churches. Your spirit was probably murdered in so many small ways as you grew up, wondering sometimes why your life didn't seem to matter that much. You carried the wounds of that unjust system that we have all created and we all sustain.

I grew up, George, as a white man in a white neighborhood and I learned so many 'truths' about this being a fair country and a place that everyone has an equal chance. I have lived and worked in Brooklyn, NY for 23 years in an African American community and have learned over and over that these 'truths' are lies. So many young people, in communities like yours, have their life course set by 3 years old.

Finally, George, as you pleaded to just breathe under that knee of hate, you must have seen the two feet of another police officer just a few feet away. You must have thought that, surely, he would care and do something to stop the murder. Surely there must be some strain of truth in

the American story that we all have God given inalienable rights and even a right to pursue happiness. I am so sorry George that his two feet stayed still and his arms limply dangled. He did choose to protect – sadly, not you – but the violent and oppressive system that killed you.

George, please pray for us Passionists. We, like you, are strugglers along the way. Pray to God for us that we might honor our vow to remember the crucified and to know that you, George, live in every community where we live. Pray that we seek you out, find out where you live, get to know you and once we do - to never, ever stand by idly and let you be murdered again. Breathe freely now George until we all meet in Christ and finally and fully realize that we were always one!

Respectfully in the Passion of Jesus,

V. Rev. James O'Shea, CP  
Provincial