My sisters and brothers, my fellow faith leaders of our community, honored guests, friends and neighbors all -

The eyes of our nation have been fixed on Buffalo these past, excruciatingly difficult days - and, as we must acknowledge, for all the wrong reasons.

We’ve experienced a demonstration of pure hatred and evil, an act of blatant and violent racism; we have suffered indescribable loss, the likes of which has left us stunned and stricken with searing heartache.

Something is terribly wrong when a trip to the grocery store can be an occasion to experience such unmitigated violence, such callous disregard for human life, such life-altering trauma that will stay with us and the East Buffalo community especially for years to come. Each morning we awake with the only hope that all of this has been but a terrible nightmare, and that those cherished loved ones that have been taken from us in the span of those few horrific moments are somehow still among us.

In the midst of such tragedy, however, we are also able to discern what is right and good among us. The shared grief; so many acts of consolation, care and concern for the families and friends affected so intimately; a community that has come together to insist and declare that this is not who we are - that this event does not and will not define us and what Buffalo is all about. But - as I trust we all agree - it should not require a tragedy of such magnitude to lead us to cherish one another; to be there for each other - to recognize the sacredness and inherent worth of every human person.
Most Reverend Michael W. Fisher  
Bishop of Buffalo

We condemn with every fiber of our being the attitudes, ideologies and forces that inspired such vile prejudice and hatred. We call out and equally condemn political viewpoints - however subtle or nuanced - that attempt to divide us for political advantage; that try to shroud and validate abhorrent and blatant bias as legitimate theory; that deny the inherent dignity and respect that each and every one of us - and yes, our Black sisters and brothers who continue to suffer the effects of systemic racism - has been granted by none other than our Supreme God.

Enough is enough! How much more will it take for people of honest intent and self-professed faith to rise and stand together, and defeat once and for all the forces of hatred, prejudice and division?

The Gospel passage from John is a clear reminder that if we truly love the Lord, then we will keep His word. It doesn’t take a theology degree to discern what the word of the Lord requires. They are intuitive for all people of faith, irrespective of religious tradition:

First and foremost, love of one another - and as Jesus demonstrated - love that inspires us to lay down our lives for each other. It requires care and concern for those in need, those whose prospects are less - and then discernible effort to alleviate their struggle. It requires giving voice to those who society has ignored or discarded - speaking up and speaking out when the actions and words of some would diminish others, slandering individuals and whole communities with repulsive stereotypes and distortions. It means demonstrating hearts of true empathy, and a commitment to doing whatever is in our power to reach out and support those whose lives have been marked by tragedy and injustice, through no fault of their own.

It requires courage, perseverance and constant vigilance!

This moment - this horrible episode that is now a dreaded mile-marker on our long and difficult journey to being a better community - must not be allowed to recede without real and measurable change. Each of us in our own minds and hearts - in our own capacity to do something good - must be changed.

As our Gospel details, Jesus offered His disciples a way forward at a time when it seemed their high hopes and bold ambitions were at an end: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Jesus promises an Advocate - the gift of the Holy Spirit who would further teach them and remind them constantly of all that the Lord had said to them.
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It was this gift of God’s abiding presence through the Holy Spirit that emboldened them to go out and preach to all nations the Good News they had received - the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Together this day and in this tragic hour, let us lay claim to the Spirit of God to comfort and heal us - to embolden us in ways that we perhaps feared or avoided before - in order to bind the wounds that this act of violence and evil has inflicted and which remain exposed.

What will we now do that we should have, could have done before?  
Who will we seek out who before we might have avoided or ignored?  
How will we demonstrate our faith in ways that unmistakably reflect the word and love of God?

Let us resolve not to wait a day or a moment longer to answer these questions as we know we must.

To the families - children, brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents - of those taken from us, our hearts ache with you and we want you to know that we are with you in these terrible days and will be in the many days ahead. We wrap our arms around you and although we cannot fully measure the pain you carry, we want you to know that we share your grief, your loss and your tears. You are not alone and your consolation and healing is our constant preoccupation.

May God in His infinite compassion and love abide with us all and in His abundant mercy, grant us peace.

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