

North and South, East and West

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Whenever we think of the Church, we naturally think of Europe and the United States. The Christian faith originated out of Europe and, as Americans, it flourished in our land. This gives us the impression that the Church belongs to the Western world, more specifically, the Northern Hemisphere of the Western world. This perspective is highly biased and hardly justifiable theologically.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." Jesus' view of the Kingdom (and by extension of the church) is much more universal and expansive than we are used to. While the road to heaven is like a narrow gate, the pool of candidates for the kingdom comes from all over the globe. As the prophet *Isaiah* in the First Reading said, "Thus says the Lord...I come to gather nations of every language."

Those of us who think that the kingdom belongs to us because we belong to the first world, are part of the greatest nation, or are a privileged race might want to rethink that position. It was to those who thought highly of themselves that Jesus said, 'I do not know you; depart from me.' Instead, he claimed that the Kingdom of God is for the lowly and forgotten, "for behold, some are last who will be first."

In our own times, the Church is growing most significantly in the global south. The third world countries that we look down upon are the places that the Holy Spirit is working most clearly. This is not to say that

the Holy Spirit isn't working here, but sometimes our priorities and attitudes are obstacles to all that the Holy Spirit wants to do in and for us.

At St. Matthias we are so honored to have the presence of Catholics from the Global South in our congregation. Even though they are now established here, they have family and friends back home. Whether it is the Haitians, Brazilians, Nigerians, or people from the many other nations represented here, their presence is a blessing to us because it helps us better imagine the Kingdom of God, a place where all the nations can recline at God's table as equals. At that table, the Son of God lives in all of us and looks like all of us.

As Catholics, we have a head start. We belong to a church that is universal, spread throughout the world and transcends nations. We are not limited geographically, as many institutions and organizations are. The Eucharist we share is the same Body and Blood of Christ offered always and everywhere.

The Kingdom of God is comprised of people of every race coming to dine at the table of the Lord.

What am I doing right now to better reflect God's universal kingdom?

Let us pray for the day when north, south, east, and west become transcended and therefore irrelevant, for on that day, we will dine with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the heavenly kingdom.