

Homily - 20th Sunday - Year A - August 16, 2020

There is nothing like a pandemic to bring home some very sobering realities. First, COVID-19 has disclosed that deadly illnesses ignore national boundaries. Second, we are all vulnerable humans. How can anyone fail to empathize with those whose lives came to an end so suddenly, especially the elderly and the most vulnerable? Third, and this one is unfortunate, because of the nature of Covid-19, we have had to force separation one from another, and we look upon one another as sources of contagion. Hopefully, this separation is a stepping stone to getting back together again.

The readings for this Sunday call our attention to the workings of the human family. Isaiah offers us an invitation to rethinking our lineage — Isaiah is saying that God is inviting into the family, the Chosen People, those who are “loving the name of the Lord.” That fact forced the Israelites to admit that God seeks the heart that longs for him, beyond any tribal affiliation.

In the Gospel, the Canaanite woman shows herself to be such a person in her pleading to Jesus to cast out the demon from her daughter. We would think that this courageous woman heard the text of Isaiah and was reminding Jesus that in the New Covenant the table overflows with an excess of God’s promise much too great to measure. The Canaanite woman’s faith is matchless, including its hope and love in God’s promise.

So, what about us? Are we willing to sit at the same table with those who do not form our tribe? Or are we afraid of a kind of “contagion” from people who do not think the way we do? Diversity is one of the key catch words in today’s society. When we speak about diversity, then we acknowledge a difference among persons. In fact, whenever there are two persons, there is diversity. We are not all the same, but, in our diversity, we are still all sons and daughters of God and, in our Catholic understanding of humanity, we must reach out to our brothers and sisters and treat them as made in the image and likeness of God. We can maintain our diversity and respect for the other person. It’s not easy. Sure, we can lock up others in the cages of our imagination and throw away the key, but God help us if we do so.

The Lord makes no distinction among races, gender or sexual orientation. And neither, by the way, do lethal viruses. You will read in today's bulletin about our small effort to pray for National Unity and an End to Racism. I encourage you to participate in this prayer effort in every way that you can. You know as well as I do that our country is diverse. Unfortunately, we seem to highlight the differences rather than what unites us. Secular forces will call it something like national pride, but they are unable to formulate a clear definition of what that means. Here, our pride is rooted in the fact that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. So, join in this prayer effort for the nine days and hopefully come to the prayer service either in church or online on November 27. Details are in the bulletin.

Everyone needs the mercy of God, even if it amounts to only crumbs of bread. So, maybe, we just need to start begging. Maybe if we learn how to beg in our prayer we can accomplish greater unity in our country and an end to all forms of racism.