

081708 20th Sunday in OT Ecumenism and Youth

There are many themes we could pick from today's readings. God's Scripture is like that – His voice speaks to us in differing ways at different times. Two themes came to me as I prepared for this homily. The first theme from the Scripture readings is about ecumenism... that word that means working with, praying with and seeking unity with our separated Christian brothers and sisters. Each of the readings today has to do with God's love... God's mercy and His attention not being exclusive to one group. The Jews were the chosen people of God. He may have had a singular relationship and formed covenants with the Jews -- but God is the God of all creation and all peoples. So let's talk about ecumenism. There are ecumenical activities going on at the highest levels in the Church. Most of us don't even know of the efforts at unity and common worship – but these are lengthy and fraught with many complex issues. There have been over 125 generations of major differences between the Christian faiths... differences regarding teachings, authority, liturgy, sacraments and more. But how about us at a local level?

I had the good fortune to live back in Estes Park, Colorado. There were several venues for working with people of other faiths. I was on the board of directors for a caring pregnancy center. It was supported by 8 churches in town. I also was a volunteer and later on the board of directors for an agency called Crossroads Ministry – it was a food bank and help agency, not unlike St. Vincent de Paul here in town.

Crossroads Ministry was supported by a dozen of the Christian churches and it was very important in a town that had primarily summer seasonal employment with a high cost-of-living.

As vice-president of the board, I was able to work with Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist and other pastors and good Christian people. We should never presume to know the mind of God – but humbly it seems God must smile on such endeavors because they truly helped so many people. I also thought it was important to bring ecumenism right into our Catholic Church in town.

A few times I issued this challenge to the ladies of our Colorado parish... I said, “Listen – the Methodists and the Lutherans have religious services that have praise and worship and hymns... they have ladies auxiliaries and men’s service organizations... how are we Catholics different? In the interest of ecumenism – would you ladies consider doing something to make outreach to other churches?” What I suggested was that the Catholic ladies of our Colorado parish make arrangements for a breakfast – and to invite the ladies of the Methodist and later other churches to breakfast... to pray and sing a couple hymns with them... and then to serve them breakfast. To show them that we recognize Christ present in them.

Well – that idea fell on deaf ears – because most never heard of Catholics doing that for Protestants before. However, by the time we left, our parish was routinely... routinely having ecumenical Thanksgiving music and prayer services at the Catholic Church.

It was standing room only with Protestant pastors and music from a number of churches represented at this Thanksgiving service. The Knights of Columbus were doing a community-wide pancake breakfast that the Knights cooked... and men from other churches served it and did clean up.

These sorts of things are not ... not going to lead anyone to become Catholics.... But that isn't a primary goal. The goal is to try to find ways to respect Christ-present in our other-faith family members. I ask us to consider that here in this community of faith. Add ecumenism to the things we want to do as Catholics.

The other theme I want to mention today is caring for our youth. I have not had the opportunity for much ministry with young people – although I love them. It is often said that they are the future of our country and of our Church. The woman who approached Jesus today in the Gospel asked for health for her daughter. While Jesus did some dialogue with her about her non-Jewish status – we know the end of the story. Jesus healed the young girl.

We know of the love of Jesus for young people... let them come to me, he said. I challenge each of us hearing these words today... are you regularly praying for our young people? Are you challenging this parish to do more for its young people? More programs, more equipment, more venues?

Our DRE – the director of religious education is here at this liturgy. Let her or others not see this as a challenge against what they are already doing – but see it as a plea for more involved people, more attractive programs. More funds. And to the rest -- are you doing anything to help with our young people programs?

One Sunday I was invited to come and participate in a music and Eucharistic Adoration service for the young teen folks. I prayed and worked so hard to get ready for that evening. There were two teenagers present that night. What a crushing blow to the message and reality that Christ is present inside that tabernacle... and when He is brought out as the Blessed Sacrament --- real.... REAL graces are flowing to hearts open to receive them... to receive Jesus into their hearts and minds and souls... Two teenagers showed up.

Those of you who have computers – whether you are young teens or adults... I want to ask you to go to TYLERSRIDE.COM.... that's TYLERSRIDE.COM and look at a multipart high quality series filmed for the internet... It's about a young guy – TYLER... and it's about the meaning of life... finding meaning in a young person's life. And the interesting thing about the story is that as the young Tyler begins to find meaning in his life – he truly helps his parents and sister and others to find meaning... Jesus said Go and become disciples... We need to let our young people know that they are called to that challenge... as are we adults... even us grandparents.

We may come to church once a week... we may have read some books about Jesus ... but the question is: What is the meaning of life? Is Jesus real to you? Then if the answer is YES – why aren't we all doing more to put our faith into action?

Reading 1

Is 56:1, 6-7

Thus says the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants— all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant, them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

R. (4) O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.

So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!
May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!
R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Reading II

Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Gospel

Mt 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a

demon.” But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus’ disciples came and asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.” He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, “Lord, help me.” He said in reply, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.” Then Jesus said to her in reply, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And the woman’s daughter was healed from that hour.