

20th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 56:1, 6-7;
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32;
Matthew 15:21-28
Little Flower - 8/20/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

If there is one theme running through today's readings, it is that our God is an inclusive God. In the first reading, God through Isaiah prophesies that his house will be "*a house of prayer for all peoples.*" In today's Gospel, Jesus heals a Canaanite woman's daughter. Paul refers to himself as the apostle to the Gentiles.

These readings seem especially appropriate after Sherry Meyer's talk last Sunday and after what happened in Charlottesville, Virginia, last weekend.

As Christians, we believe God is the creator of all and wills the salvation of all people. Likewise, we believe that Jesus offered his life to God for us so that all people might have fulness of life. In fact, St. Paul makes the point that Jesus came to reconcile both Jews and Gentiles with God and with one another, which he accomplished through the cross [Col. 1:20]. The cross is the symbol of reconciliation: the vertical bar symbolizes reconciliation between God and us, and the horizontal bar symbolizes our reconciliation with one another.

The corollary of all this is that if God is Father of us all, then we are brothers and sisters of all. We, then, have to see, love, and treat others as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Last Monday the reading from Deuteronomy reminded us that God has a special love and care for widows, orphans, and aliens. These were the three most vulnerable groups in Jewish society. To use Pope Francis' word, these were the people at the peripheries. However, God went even further and reminded the Israelites, "*So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt*" [Deut. 10:19].

For many years, there has been a debate within our country about immigrants and refugees. In the midst of all the rhetoric, we need to ask ourselves about our personal attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. Sherry Meyer told us that there are as many refugees from South Sudan in the Ugandan Diocese of Arua as there are natives. Imagine if there were as many refugees in Indianapolis as natives. Many people in our country believe we have more immigrants and refugees than we can handle, yet all of them together are only a fraction of our total population. This is not just an issue or problem in the United States. Issues involving immigrants and refugees are also dividing the European Union. We need to ask ourselves if we really see immigrants and refugees as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Charlottesville, Virginia, should be a wake-up call for all of us in the United States. It was not only a symbol of the deep divisions within our country. It was also a symbol of the deep-seated racism and hatred that exists in our country by various groups toward other groups. In the midst of the civil rights struggles of the 1960's, who would have thought that in 2008 we would elect our first African-American president, but we did. Although one can argue that a lot of progress has been made in becoming a more inclusive society, what happened in Charlottesville reminds us how far we have to go. We need to ask ourselves if we have any racism or hatred in our heart toward any individuals or groups.

My brothers and sisters, the Church is called to witness to the world all that the world can be by living Gospel values, values that will help humanize the world, values that will make the world a better place for all people now and into the future. Inclusion is one of those values. Therefore, as individuals and as a Church, we must model inclusivity by actively welcoming among us those who may not be like us, who may, in fact, be very different from us.