

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Fr. Bob

There are a couple of stories about Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker.

A reporter came to interview Dorothy at her office on 4th Street in Manhattan. He could see her talking to a man who was either drunk or mentally ill. Time passed and the reporter grew impatient. Dorothy finally turned and said, "Are you waiting to speak to one of us?" Obviously, Dorothy did not think that she was more important than the person she was with.

One day a woman came in and donated a diamond ring to the Catholic Worker. We all wondered what Dorothy would do with it. She could have one of us take it down to a diamond exchange and sell it. It would certainly fetch a month's worth of beans. That afternoon, Dorothy gave the diamond ring to an old woman who lived alone and often came to us for meals. "That ring would have paid her rent for the better part of a year." someone protested. Dorothy replied that the woman had her dignity; she could sell it if she likes and spend the money for rent, a trip to the Bahamas, or keep the ring to admire. "Do you suppose," Dorothy said, "God created diamonds only for the rich?"

On this 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time our scripture talks to us about the expansive nature of God's kingdom—of the kingdom that Jess came to inaugurate.

The Gospel today can sound rather harsh. But Jesus was referring to protocol. And this protocol that Jesus' contemporaries understood was that salvation should come to sinful humankind, first to the Jews and to all the people of the earth.

And this Canaanite was not only a woman but also was of a caste, a tribe that was at enmity with the Jews. She was not only a gentile—but even more distant from the Jews. And so Jesus uses this instance to teach those about him that the protocol—the way everyone thought it should be done—is to be thrown out the window! Some people have softened his rather harsh remarks to the woman by translating the comment as throwing food to the "pets" rather than the image of ravenous dogs. But essentially the reality is that he uses this instance to show that faith and goodness, salvation and mercy are not to be contained—but belong everywhere.

And Dorothy Day was one of the prophets of the day whose vision allowed her to see people as equal—to admit all to the table where one is not distinguishable from the next. She recognized the mark of the children of God—and that was all that was necessary.

Of course we haven't gotten too far with this idea over the centuries!

We look at people and attempt to determine their worth and value, their possibility based on what we see—on our vision. And so the way they dress can determine them. If they are a bit unkempt we can make up a

story about them and reduce them. Tattoos or piercing can help us determine a person. Their lifestyle—if they are married or single—if they've had multiple marriages or if they are gay. We certainly love to determine a person's worth by the car they drive or the house they live in.

And so while we might not be as concerned as the ancients were about tribe or caste, we have our own determining system.

Of course if a person looks like they come from the Middle East—there are plenty of people who won't get on a plane with them or would keep away from their briefcase! I guess we forget that Timothy McVeigh looked like the boy next store.

And so, I suppose, we have a lot of work to do with our vision. And the "we" might be our church—perhaps our Church protocol needs some work. And the "we" could be this local church, the Church of St. Anselm. We can get too proud of our openness and not see where the obstacles are. And of course the "we" is often you and I as individuals who spend a good deal of energy separating people and categorizing them.

The goal for us has to be the image of Isaiah in the first reading—"my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." Our vision needs to be expansive enough to be able to see all as welcome, to see the fact that we all belong to one another—that in fact, in the eyes of God, there is no separation.

There is a story about a man Jeremy Cohen who with his family in Texas became the hosts of a rabbi from Moscow during the Christmas holidays. To treat the rabbi to a culinary experience probably not available to him in his own county. The Cohens took him to their favorite Chinese restaurant. After an enjoyable meal and pleasant conversation, the waiter brought the check and presented each person at the table with a small brass Christmas ornament as a complimentary gift.

Everyone laughed when Cohen's father turned the ornament over and read the label "Made in India." Their laughter quickly subsided, however, when they realized that there were tears running down the rabbi's cheeks. Cohen asked the rabbi if he were offended at having been given a gift or a Christian holiday. Smiling, the rabbi shook his head and answered, "No, I was shedding tears of joy to be in such a wonderful country in which a Buddhist gives a Jew a Christmas gift made by a Hindu."

Let us practice this week expanding our vision—or clearing it, perhaps. Let's try to see beyond the dressing and the behaviors and the wrappings and see the child of God, especially in the most difficult. And then we can truly pray and worship the God of us all.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 56:1-7

Romans 11:13-32

Matthew 15:21-28

August 17, 2014

靈 修 生 活

無 條 件 的 接 納

杜 湘 梅

聖保祿致羅馬人書這樣說：「如果他們被接納，豈不是死而復生嗎？」(羅十一 15) 想起在工作中，偶然會接觸到一些寄養家庭。寄養父母都很用心照顧孩子，可是孩子因著複雜的成長背景，很多時出現情緒及行為問題，不時帶給寄養家庭一定的困擾。我明白寄養孩子在成長的歷程中經驗過被遺棄，早已失去了安全感及對人的信任。我也擔心寄養父母因忍受不了孩子的問題而放棄孩子；況且孩子總有一天會離開這家庭，寄養父母不會得到甚麼豐厚的回報。可能寄養父母早有心理準備，他們對孩子的接納能力，許多時令人很感動。如果孩子能在寄養父母悉心的照顧下成長起來，將會「死而復生」呢！

近日一位朋友跟我提及收養孩子一事，我發現自己比較自私。我再三忠告她小心考慮一些客觀因素，免得日後帶來不少煩惱。朋友卻認為她只要肯付出真愛，孩子一定感受到而愛這個家，她也不會為孩子日後的離去而難過，她相信每個人都希望成為「家」的一份子。不過，朋友卻堅持收養的是一個嬰孩，因為還是希望孩子的問題簡單一點。這樣看來，要達到如聖保祿宗徒所說：「因著他們的不服從而蒙受憐憫」(羅十一 30) 的接納境界，似乎困難多了。

要無條件、無寄望的接納真是很困難。在依撒意亞先知書所述，天主只接納那些「皈依了上主，事奉上主，愛慕上主的名，做祂的僕人，遵守安息日，不予以褻瀆，並固守我的盟約」(依五十六 6) 的人。可是渴望受到接納的人，很多時心裡都是充滿矛盾，既希望被認受為團體的一份子，但又怕過於「高調」而受到排斥，更怕一不小心做錯了事，再被拒諸門外。只要能獲得接納，就如今日福音記載的婦人所說的如小狗一般，只吃主人枱上掉下來的碎屑也可以。

在信仰的歷程中，我算不上是一個「聽教聽話」的孩子，我也不如嬰孩般純潔，卻常常做著一些有違上主旨意的事情，因此常害怕天主忘記我、懲罰我；幸好，我至今仍感受到上主給我的許多的恩賜，祂並沒有放棄我。「天主把眾人都禁錮在不服從中，是為了要憐憫眾人。」(羅十一 32) 這句話是我對信仰的一點體會。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 八 月 十 七 日

依 56:1-7; 羅 11:13-32; 瑪 15:21-28