

Sample Homily – Open Door Approach

"And 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. For behold, some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last." Luke 13:30

These statements contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus. People objected, "We ate and drank in your company. You taught in our streets". Jesus challenged the claims of exclusivity made by the chosen people. Being number one in the Kingdom because of birth or nation or race or religion was a claim He rejected.

The situation Luke confronted historically was the admission of Greeks and Romans to the company of the baptized, without prior circumcision. Peter stood for the position that Christians needed to be Jews first. Paul stood for an open door approach. In the Council of Jerusalem the church decided for a more inclusive practice.

A situation in our time that needs similar reflection is the immigration debate. Following the federal government's refusal to enact comprehensive immigration reform, local governments are taking the law into their own hands, sometimes in ways that will discriminate and violate the basic rights of immigrants. In our time, our Catholic Bishops are challenging all Catholics to remember the Gospel call to welcome the stranger. Cardinal McCarrick writes, "We believe that immigration is not just a theoretical political issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue that impacts the basic dignity and life of the person, created in the image and likeness of God. It is because of its impact on basic human dignity and human life, that we believe immigration is, first and foremost, a moral issue".

Last week I read a story about the twin cities of El Paso in the USA, and Juarez across the frontier in Mexico. Their citizens assembled to protest the building of the wall along the border. They were joined by both mayors. They stood on the bridge El Paso del Norte and declared, "We want Mexico City and Washington to know that for our cities, the border does not divide, but unites our cities". They were standing on a bridge, not a wall. Not long ago we celebrated the dismantling of the Berlin Wall that divided East and West Germany. It would be a strange anomaly to celebrate the building of a wall between North and South. The debate over immigration may be better served by building bridges of understanding, not walls of separation.

A particularly acute example of the crisis in the immigration system is the situation of many young adult migrants who, through no fault of their own, were brought into the United States illegally as children. In the following years they were educated in American schools, became endowed with American values, and came to cherish our long-standing traditions of liberty and equality. In short, they became American. Now many live under the threat of deportation and of being banished from the only home that they have ever known. These young adults, who want nothing other than the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the American community, seek only the opportunity to do so with the hope that they will make you all proud in the process.

Another clear symbol of this Sunday's Gospel is the cross itself. The arms of the cross, like the scriptures of today, point to God's saving action north, south, east and west, in a universal embrace. The Celtic cross adds a circle at the centre to bring home the message of the Cosmic Christ whose claim is global. "They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord". Isaiah 66:20