

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time C
Is 66:18-21; Heb 12:5-7, 11-13; Lk 13:22-30
August 21, 2022

Today's reading from the prophet Isaiah begins with the words, "*I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather nations of every language.*" In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that people from east and west, north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God. It is God's strong desire to bring people together. Unity is one of the signs of God's presence, and it is a sign of the presence of Jesus' disciples.

But the reality for most of us is that we do not experience much unity. In fact, we are much more likely to experience separateness, division, fragmentation and violence in our world today. Many people are alienated – they do not feel connected to others. Color, ethnicity, religion, levels of education, wealth, and different cultural attitudes divide us. All of these give rise to prejudice, and we see much evidence of that too. But the call and challenge of the Gospel is to change our attitudes – to take part in bringing God's reign into our world by working for unity and establishing God's universal family.

How might we begin this change? We must allow ourselves to feel the painfulness of the situation in our world today. Some people never reflect on what is going on around them from day to day – they never reach any real level of awareness that would motivate them to try to create a better world. They just take it all for granted. Their main concerns remain at the level of eating, drinking, and living a happy-go-lucky life. If they come to Church and listen to the Gospel, it seems to pass over their heads, and they go through the week as if they never heard it. Scripture is proclaimed so that we can do something about it; it challenges us to take God seriously.

Today's Scriptures invite us to hear the message that God's will for the human race is unity. If we are willing to hear that message and think about it, then we cannot BUT be disturbed by the disunity and separateness that is a common experience today. Being disturbed by those things should move us towards doing something about the larger problems we see around us. But what can we do? We all sometimes feel helpless about the larger problems we see around us. Yet even a small ripple in the center of a lake can spread out as far as the shore.

We first need to start with reconciliation. Reconciliation happens when people are willing to put aside their prejudices and come closer together. Each one of us should be convinced that we must reach out to welcome all people, especially those who are different from ourselves. When I

was a deacon in Missouri, ten young men and women and three adult leaders of our parish traveled to the Rosebud Indian Reservation to paint, clean and interact with the adults and children who live there. Listening to them talk about their trip, this was an attitude changing experience for them, something that they will carry with them every day of their lives. We are not called just to be welcoming to those who are different than us.

We are called to be welcoming to those new to our community, civic and parish. We will never understand what God's Kingdom is about as long as we are willing only to recognize those who we know or those who are like us.

I ask each of you to take the time to extend a personal greeting, not just today, but whenever you are here for Mass or a parish event, to someone you may not recognize.

The power of the Gospel, if we are open to it, is a driving force urging us to bring people together.

We should make it a personal priority to make friends with people who are of a different ethnic, cultural, or religious background from ourselves.

That is what bringing the Kingdom of God is about, and that is what experiencing the presence of the Kingdom of God is about.

We may need reconciliation within ourselves. Many people have no inner peace because they are constantly being pulled this way or that way by their fears, angers, or jealousies. We can decide to let go of these things if we want to and invite the Spirit to come and bring us peace of heart.

All of us (We) need healing. The Gospels are full of healing stories. Healing people was one of the ways Jesus used for announcing that the power of evil was being overcome and that the Kingdom of God was breaking into the world. People who were healed usually came to a change of faith and a new heart. Today the need for healing is all around us. The world is full of emotional pain. Our young people are growing up experiencing many things that hurt them – parental divorce, loneliness, violence, sexual abuse - the absence of love. We need to have more healing services in our Catholic communities – people should not have to go to other churches to find healing and comfort.

Neighborhoods too can find healing through anti-drug and anti-violence programs, for example. Wherever there is healing, there is the Kingdom of God.

The last point has to do with liberation. Although we claim to live in a free country, many people are not inwardly free. They have little self-discipline, they are slaves to their passions and

desires, they are driven by whatever feeling urges them on at any given moment. St. Paul tells us that Jesus has freed us from the law of sin and death. Freedom, just like reconciliation and healing, must come from within ourselves.

To become inwardly free is a process that involves a deep, personal transformation **(alteration, change)** and the opening up of ourselves (a person) to the power of God's Spirit. It involves a surrender and a letting-go of the things that enslave us, followed by a movement in a different direction.

I began by talking about God's great desire to bring all people together, and how this is actually what the Kingdom of God is all about.

This holy meal, the Eucharist we are about to share, is a reminder of what this unity means. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we are making the Kingdom of God symbolically present. It will be up to us to make it a reality in our daily lives.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.