

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C: 20, June, 2010

I believe that you will agree with me when I say that we humans make judgments or form opinions concerning one another often based on limited information. We are constantly categorizing and grouping people in all sorts of ways and using various criteria in making these distinctions: rich/poor, old/young, male/female, white collar/blue collar, native born/immigrant and so forth. And often these distinctions are accompanied with negative feelings toward one group or another--- usually based upon the group to which we belong. However, rarely do we criticize or express disappointment in the group with which we identify.

Being suspicious of "the other" has been around for a very long time. For example, in today's Second Reading we can observe Paul trying to break down some of those barriers and biases--- barriers and biases that he knew were deep seated.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul, a man of his times, and most likely a person who accepted some biases, was convinced that our oneness in Christ and our common bond of baptism trumped all of these categories and distinctions. It's clear that he was disappointed, that in matters of faith, people continued to make such distinctions. He argued that it should never be that way for the Christian community.

These distinctions that we sometimes make--- that categorizing and labeling that we often find ourselves engaging in--- are simply ways that allow us to remain in that "special place", which much like a two-year old, we don't want to give up. You know that "special place"; it's the center of the universe.

It's that place where my feelings count the most and my opinions carry the most weight. It's the place where my struggles deserve the most attention and my needs get attended to first. It's the place where my children are better than everyone else's and my wants always need to be fulfilled. And it's where my accomplishments count the most and my sins and failings count the least.

The "center of the universe"--- a place where we would all like to be, a place we never want to leave, but also a place which has absolutely no place in our lives as Christians, despite our deep desires that it be so. Remember these words from the Gospel: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Now, it's hard for us not to protect what we have--- our material things, our ideas, our opinions, our status, our "central place" in our own little universe. It just seems like that's the way it's supposed to be. And for some, that's all they've ever known. And yet, we have quite a bit of evidence to the contrary--- evidence that contradicts the way in which many people lead their lives. This evidence is shown most perfectly through the words and deeds of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The example, which we should be prepared to embrace, is right in front of us. We need only gaze upon the crucifix and fix our sights on the Lord, fix our sights on the one who gave his life for our sake, without counting the cost.

Like those who have had a whole new world opened to them once they accepted a new way of thinking, that the Earth wasn't the center of the universe, and once they trusted the evidence before them, then we too can have a whole new way of experiencing the world--- once we truly take to heart and place our trust in living as Jesus is asking us to live. But if we continue to disregard or water-down the teachings of Jesus, or placing our trust in how we think things should be, we'll only experience this life in a limited and diminished way, falling far short of the life that God wants us to have.

So when we find ourselves turning toward our "own" center of the universe, we need to remember those people who first believed that the Earth wasn't the center of the universe. If we can duplicate their courage and let go of our me fixation, and sincerely begin trusting in Jesus' words and teachings--- such as, denying ourselves, losing our lives for Jesus and picking up our crosses--- imagine the world that awaits us, a world radically transformed by God's mercy, generosity and love.