

18 Sunday C

St. Patrick

July 31, 2022

The New Testament Letter to the Colossians puts it like this, **“You have clothed yourself with the new self...In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free: but Christ is all and in all”** (3:11).

The following story, told in his autobiography, took place before Nelson Mandela’s 27-year imprisonment on account of his struggle against apartheid. He had been invited to Europe to talk about this struggle and he was on his return trip to South Africa:

“We put down briefly in Khartoum, where we changed to an Ethiopian Airways flight to Addis. Here I experienced a rather strange sensation. As I was boarding the plane I saw the pilot was black. I had never seen a black pilot before, and the instant I did I had to quell my panic. *How could a black man fly an airplane?* But a moment later I caught myself: I had fallen into the apartheid mind-set, thinking Africans were inferior and that flying was a white man’s job. I sat back in my seat and chided myself for such thoughts. Once we were in the air, I lost my nervousness...” (1)

Oh, just as President Mandela did, I can size up someone in my mind—Is that common within you?—categorize them according current distinctions, and make a judgment on them.

“But Christ is all and in all”: Because of our baptismal consecration—in which, by grace we **“put on the new self”** (Colossians 3:10)—we are called to break down divisions among us...and within our very selves.

Thirty years ago I walked out of my home at the diocesan apartments in midtown and, on the parking lot there alone, saw a Black man about thirty yards away. His back was to me. I was aware then that I felt uneasy, even unsafe. The man turned around: it was the newly-appointed Bishop of Memphis, Bishop Steib, who had arrived here a few weeks earlier! He was dressed casually, and at first I didn't recognize him with his back to me.

I have never forgotten that feeling of mine and have regretted it deeply. Racial and class profiling is far more common than many of us care to admit.

In the Letter to the Colossians the Apostle Paul identifies the varied races and factions at enmity with each other in the first century. Yes, Paul specifically names those factions at odds with one another in his time. And he faces those divisions head-on: **“But Christ is all and in all.”**

Paul names those divisions. *Our* list of divisions—around race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, political loyalty—they are many, and they deeply separate us.

Faith in the Risen Jesus empowers us to break down divisions which are so strident in our day. It’s not just a “feel-good” exercise of being nice. It’s our vocation. It’s our calling. It’s our baptismal consecration. As Paul put it, in baptism **“we have been clothed with the new self.”**

I’ve quoted it before, from the 17th century Saint Vincent de Paul. A couple of years ago Bishop David sent this quote to all the priests. I cut it out and keep it on my desk. I hope it becomes part of me one day: **“Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favorable light at all times and under all circumstances.”**

Yes, let’s face those barriers of fear and prejudice, profiling and judging. As disciples in Christ, let’s do our part to bring healing, weaving us together as one people.

Isn’t that what the word “catholic” means?

(1) Nelson R. Mandela, Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), pp. 254-55. I am grateful to parishioner Tom Kirchberg for pointing out this passage to me.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

July 31, 2022

18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Renew and heal our universal church, that we may be trustworthy in our witness; we pray to you, O Lord—

Strengthen Pope Francis as he ends his pilgrimage to the indigenous peoples of Canada, offering an apology for the abuse of decades ago. Heal that scourge within the church, and bring about justice and hope; we pray to you, O Lord—

Break down the barriers of hatred and suspicion that divide us from one another, too often erupting in violence; we pray to you, O Lord—

Convert us to order our priorities rightly, and look first to our relationship with God rather than our possessions; we pray to you O Lord—

Comfort the ill, the infirm, the elderly and the homeless as they struggle to deal with the summer's extreme heat; we pray to you, O Lord—

Welcome to your heavenly banquet table all who have gone before us in faith, especially Beau Grauer; we pray to you, O Lord--