

Homily for Trinity Sunday, Year B, 2009
(Deuteronomy 4: 32-34, 39-40; Romans 8: 14-17; Mathew 28: 16-20)

WE ARE ALL GOOD PEOPLE

A few winters ago, some of the families of our parish took a vacation in Jamaica. It was, I presume, a good and restful time. Upon their return, one of the Dads on this trip shared with me a story about a heart-wrenching experience that he had on this excursion.

Like many of the places where we Americans vacation, Jamaica presents a contrast between the well-off and the desperately poor. At the compound where the families were staying, the resort owners had erected a sturdy and very high fence around the place. The man I mentioned noticed that on the beach outside this fence were a large number of straggly looking folks who often peered in to see how the other half lives. One day, the man went on the other side of the fence to speak to these people. He engaged in a conversation with them that lasted, on and off, for several days. He also took them food from the hotel – and he got into trouble with the hotel staff for this! Finally, the man asked those on the other side of the fence if there was anything he could do for them. And one poor man blurted out: “when you go back home, just tell them that we are good people.”

I believe that this powerful story provides a penetrating commentary on our world today. Humanity is divided between the haves and the have-nots. This is becoming increasingly true even in our own country, especially during this recession. What is particularly sad is that the have-nots are often made to feel that they are worthless and even less than human – that they are somehow bad or at least responsible for their poverty. Furthermore, this syndrome goes beyond peoples’ financial situations. Often times those who are sick are ignored by the healthy and those who are disabled are shunned and discriminated against.

Furthermore, there are strong political and social divisions in our society. Some people think of themselves as having a corner on values while they dub those who might not see eye to eye with them as bad men and women without values. In our own Catholic Church, there is increasing division between those who consider themselves the good, faithful or loyal Catholics and the presumably “bad Catholics.” Some factions in our church are at pains to divide priests and even bishops between the “orthodox” and “unorthodox” – as if the folks in these factions were really competent to make such distinctions. Of course, this phenomenon is unjust and highly divisive. It is hurting the church when Catholics consider themselves better than others and when members of one parish or group look down their noses at members of another parish or group who are seen as somehow lacking in fidelity to church teaching. All of this gets caught up in partisan politics and there is often too easily a blurring of the distinction between vigorously upholding church doctrine on the one hand and telling people for whom to vote on the other hand. There is much partisan chatter among Catholics in printed materials, on the airwaves, and on the internet that is hateful and condemnatory of the neighbor – in total contradiction to the commandments. Some of the self-described

“loyal” Catholics have gotten in the habit of watching priests like hawks with the aim of finding some reason to label them as disobedient to authority.

Well, the gospel proclaims that God sees everyone as good. He made us good and we are all good people to him. Furthermore, God actually has a preference for the lowly and the poor – those who are victims of injustice and discrimination. Following the example of Jesus, who cared for the outcasts and the sick, the Church also strives to reach out in service to all in need. So the hungry, the weak, the forgotten are held up to us as worthy of our compassion – as are, in a special way, all children born and unborn.

This teaching about the dignity of everyone, and particularly the poor and suffering, arises precisely from the Feast that we celebrate today – the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. God is one, of course. But according to our creed, God is also a Trinity of Persons. And, logically, each divine person has equal access to the resources available to the other divine persons. And these resources are unlimited because God is the Master of the Universe. Since God made human beings in his own likeness and since the Second Person of the Trinity became a human being (while remaining God), humankind is forever joined to the Godhead; and so every human person also has the right to whatever he/she needs to live a dignified life. Christians, therefore, are called to share their resources with those in need – after the example of the Trinity itself.

So Christians are called to shun the labeling of some people in the world as “bad” – and certainly to shun thinking of people as bad because they are poor or sick or even because they are sinners. Of course sin exists and it is the only true source of evil among humanity. But divisions among people are all false when they are based on one group’s presuming to look down on another as “bad.” In the Gospel today (from Matthew), we are reminded that Jesus gave a commission to his followers to spread the gospel to all nations without exception or distinction. Jesus also tells us in this reading that he is with his church until the end of time. So the good news is that Jesus became human and taught us how to be good and how to love everyone. Like the man from St. Paul’s who reached out to the lowly in Jamaica, Jesus came to the other side of the fence to be with us poor sinners. So in accord with the gospel, I proclaim that everyone is equally beloved of God. And I say especially to the sick and the disabled: “you are loved!” You are precious to God and to the priests and people of St. Paul’s. You may sometimes feel a terrible loneliness and you may be marginalized – but you are one with us in our hearts and you are held in the heart of God. And I say to everyone at this Mass: you are all loved! I say to the children, who are here, you are precious to God! I say God loves everyone, regardless of their politics. And I say to those who feel left out or persecuted and to those who are victims – the Triune God holds you in his heart!

So let us all rejoice today in the celebration of a God who makes no distinctions – the God of the Holy Trinity who sees all and who accepts all as part of his good creation! And let us have the courage of that fellow parishioner on vacation to breach the fence that divides us in whatever way from other people. Finally, let us be assured that God says to everyone here today and to all humanity what those poor people in Jamaica wanted so desperately to hear: “You are good people!”