

28th Sunday 2007

It's quite a day here at St. Ignatius Parish. Today begins our parish series on immigration. Inspired by the Mexican and American bishops pastoral letter, "no Longer Strangers", some of our parishioners have put together an extraordinary program dealing with the many issues that affect people who come this country seeking work and/or a new home for themselves or their families but who must hide their identity for fear of disclosure and deportation.

Today our Gay and Lesbian Concerns group is meeting with the vicar-general of the diocese to share some of the stories of what it means to belong to our church community as people who are judged "defective" by official church pronouncements and whose personal struggles for integrity are not valued and affirmed.

Today is also our Call to Service Sunday. As you may already know there are many opportunities to respond to the needs of those in our society who are strangers to the basic necessities of life such as shelter and clothing, nourishment and education. Sign-ups will be after Mass at the entrance to the church.

Yes, it's quite a day here at St. Ignatius. And everything that's going on resonates with the Gospel we have just heard. The 10 lepers in the gospel are outcasts in their society. They must keep a distance so as not to contaminate those who are considered "clean". They are unclean because of their disease. And their disease defines their nature. They cannot fit in, be part of the community, sit at table because they are "other". They are estranged by the very nature of who they are. They hide their faces from the light of day and the judgment of those who exclude them from their company.

But Jesus is different in his response to the lepers. Where others would judge, exclude, distance themselves, Jesus accepts them, loves them, comes near them. In the Marcan story of the healing of the leper, Jesus touches him, identifying himself with the "unclean" and "outcast". In the Lucan version where 1 becomes 10, He tells them to go the very people who had told them that they don't belong to the community. **GO SHOW YOURSELVES** to the Priests. Jesus is telling them that they have nothing to hide. Jesus is reminding them that they are

in themselves made in the image and likeness of God whether or not they are judged to be “Defective”, “unclean”, “Non-persons” and on their way they are “healed”. But what is the healing all about. Is it a miraculous cure that makes these 10 like everyone else who had excluded them because of their disease? Are they now in the “in-crowd” because some “defect” in their nature has been erased? Perhaps 9 of them are cured but only one is healed. The healing that takes place in the one who is doubly outcast because he is a Samaritan is the healing that comes from knowing you’re are precious and valued in God’s eyes, that you do belong, no matter what society says. And this Healing leads to gratitude. Gratitude here is the deep down sense of being loved and embraced completely and without reservation for who you are in the eyes of God.

It’s really what each of us is invited to in our “face to face” encounter with Jesus. And it is what in turn is expected of us when we are tempted to exclude, judge, and make someone “other” , “stranger” than I am.

It is quite a day at St. Ignatius. Today we welcome 3 precious and beloved son and two daughters into our not quite perfect and sometimes very strange community. I know that you parents are filled with extraordinary gratitude for the gift of your children, wonderfully and beautifully made in the image and likeness of our God. And today, they begin to be made in the image and likeness of Jesus. In the waters of baptism, they are embraced fully by Jesus and embraced by us. Our hope and our prayer is that this Church community may always gift them with welcome and love throughout all the days of their lives.

Robert VerEecke, SJ