

“Honoring the Richness of Diversity: Cultures & Theology”

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The Church in every age is faced with challenges that beckon her to witness to her summons to be the *light of the world* and the *salt of the earth*.¹ Having crossed the threshold of a new century and millennium² we are only too aware of issues staring the Church squarely in the face; issues in the public square and issues involving our internal life.

One topic of concern to all of us, regarding our internal life, is the manner in which we preserve unity among the variety of peoples that is our church. The quality of our interracial and ethnic relations touches upon everything we are and do as Catholics and as citizens.³

In our day we asked to take notice of the changing face of the Church in a rapidly changing society. The 2000 census, taken together with varied social analyses or just mere cursory observation, makes us aware of the *browning* of American society. This is both a sign of progress for some but an alarm for others concerned about immigration shifts from the traditional European communities to Latin American, African, East Indian, and other Asian communities, and all that this means.

There is perhaps no other time in our history where there are such exciting vistas to work toward increased appreciation of the values of an integrated society and the role the Church has in shaping this reality. The formatters in the Christian community, i.e., teachers' catechists, youth ministers, spiritual directors, religious educators of all sorts have a significant role in shaping an attitude that affirms diversity.

Yet, the more we speak about topics like, multi-culturalism, ecumenism, diversity, inclusion, the more human nature retreats to comfort zones of homogeneity, exclusion, and isolation. Human relating is doggedly hard work with strains on the deepest emotions. All the while the Christian message coaches us to appreciate the variety that is the kingdom of God.

I find consoling the passage in the Acts of the Apostles⁴ describing the fantastic event of Pentecost when the Church was born. It was a day unrehearsed, where people with different shaped noses, different colored eyes, different hues of skin, speaking different languages came together with one voice professing one faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Matthew 5, 13-14

² Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

³ Perry, Joseph N., *A Church Without Walls*, Origin-CNS Documentary Service, March 25, 2004, vol. 33, no. 41.

⁴ Acts of the Apostles 2.

Pentecost provides the template for the peculiarity of Christian community. And being Christians we are called to offer hospitality by finding ways to make the stranger feel safe and welcomed. From Pentecost, the Christian community was an experience of diversity that caused the world's eyebrows to raise in both wonder and scorn.

II

What precisely is the current situation before us?

Our towns and cities are undergoing significant demographic change. The 2000 census indicates projections for a decrease in the white population in general and in our cities in particular. Some large metropolitan areas are witnessing a return of upwardly mobile constituencies to downtown and other redeveloped areas in a phase of *condo-mania*. Yet, these upscale communities are gated communities or gated towers for all practical purposes, separate from the working class and the poor. The central and inner cities are frequently left to blacks, Latinos and other disenfranchised groups. Economic privilege and opportunity divide the populace further intensifying racial divisions.

While much of the change would partition our Church and our community. These shifts also place a different face on Diocesan and education ministries asking for a response on our part that proactively adjusts to current trends while preserving the Church as a home for everyone and everyone's gifts. We leaders in the Church and other conscientious Catholics should be a step ahead in reflection and praxis modeling genuine Christian communities.

Given the perennial economic instabilities, job shortages and housing shortages that vex our communities we can either become more insular in the face of social change and rejecting of newcomers or we can maximize the situation and create a new society of mutual concern alongside the society given birth by the children of the earlier immigrants. We can direct our energies toward creating a harmonious community of diverse participation or succumb to the inevitability of racial and class conflict.

What is clear, the Church in the United States, with newer arrivals and diminishing numbers of children of the older immigrants, is becoming a poorer Church. The American Church of glorious brick and mortar is now downsizing due to age, aging members, smaller sized families, a certain religious syncretism and secularist accommodation. This "shrinking" of the Church causes us distress. We witness it as diminished numbers of priestly and religious vocations, the realignment if not closure of parishes and schools and other institutions. Yet, our greatest resources are undoubtedly the faithful themselves: white, black, brown, whomever...*the people of God*. Diversity is showing up in every sector of our lives as Americans. We are asked to give attention to this marvelous collection of disciples waiting for Jesus to come back for us. And if our shrinking size and wealth brings us closer to Christ and our evangelical mission, then so be it!

Civil Rights laws since the 1960s mean we share public space with one another. Blacks and other minorities have gained in American society. Yet, our country is still plagued by unacceptable percentages of poverty and unemployment that grip African Americans, Latinos and new arrivals perpetuating a scale of inequality across all aspects of American life. Individual members of the minority groups moving up the economic ladder are able to live alongside whites at least until their numbers are deemed uncomfortable. Then, whites continue to choose to shift away from living in proximity to people of color. In addition, bias had found new targets, these days, in Latinos and Muslims and certain Asians. With every conflict on the world stage America engages in raises the specter of racism and xenophobia. And you and I must start all over again, each time, teaching the truths of the Christian message.

The laws for impartial use of the public space and civic opportunity have been in place for forty years. But, we have yet to evangelize our “private space”. In some places our children can school together. We can eat in the same restaurant together and sit together with public transportation venues. The work place is integrated to some degree in many places. But, when the day is done, we return to our neighborhoods where diversity is not found, largely by choice. We settle on the rubrics of personal resources and opportunity and entitlement justifying this resulting social separation.

This means, correspondingly, that our worship space on Sunday is segregated. Our places of recreation are as well. And we see nothing strange with this arrangement. But, is this “church”: an all-white congregation, an all-black congregation? Is this how the Church should look on its principal day of assembly? Is this not another scandal that’s been around for a long time?

Privacy is a dogma of American democracy translating often as an unwritten right to prefer a white environment especially where the law chooses not to intervene. Although our cities have become more diverse, considering the newer immigrant groups, the cities are just as segregated as they were fifty years ago. After four decades of programs to integrate communities have failed, cities like Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and New York show that integration patterns don’t appear to have changed for whites and blacks since the 1920s. The color line is still strong in America. By and large, we are not more integrated post-Civil Rights and this begrudging social construct nurtures ignorance, fear, crime and inequities of all sorts. The situation also drags on the ability of the Church to create community and propagate justice. This social scene makes it difficult for the Church’s message to get through.

III

Where is the church in all this?

If we are praying to and praising Jesus Christ on Sunday why does our society look and act like it does? What is it about the Christian message that’s not transferring or not being heard? Why are we still unable to provide a kingdom feature to our communities?

If attitudes would be any different among those we serve they are influenced by the teaching that comes from our lips and the modeling of our individual lives. We must recognize the power of our words- the words we speak and the words we refuse to speak, the example we give and the example we choose to obfuscate. Don't underestimate for one second the power of the pulpit, the power of your classroom, the power involved in your direction of youth and adults.

Again, the formatters in the Christian community, i.e., priests, teachers, catechists, youth ministers and directors are strategic in shaping the present and next generation to get beyond the remnants of color bias that continue to display a certain unauthenticity of contemporary Christian life.

In our Catholic tradition, bishops are teachers of the faith, have the charge to preserve the faith and insure the faithful handing on of truths of the Catholic faith. Bishops are unable to implement the truth without the formation experts of children, youth and adults. The teaching *munus* goes unfulfilled without our collaboration. There is a very close connection between the classroom, or the catechetical program, or the youth program and the pulpit.

Those of you who are formatters in your Christian communities, sew the seeds of social habits and set patterns of conscience. By the example of your lives you inspire virtue and passionate belief in those you are forming in the spirit of Jesus. Teachers and catechists launch into the world disciples of Jesus Christ. You are formatters of the Christian lifestyle. Your discipleship must be unambiguous so that you will be found to teach with authority.

Passing on the faith is always a daunting task. We consistently examine our content and our pedagogy. And the message continues to need proclamation, namely, that racism is a sin and we Catholics need to eradicate traces of this sin from our living and ecclesial patterns.⁵

Imparting Catholic faith to our various audiences cannot ignore the Church's social message. To do so, leaves the faith in a vacuum and would deprive the faithful of a testing ground for living thorough discipleship in Christ. To absent the Church's social message about race and human dignity from your syllabus, to avoid making necessary connections and inferences with social teaching reduces Catholic faith to merely pious practice and would dilute the paschal mystery inherent in Jesus' love-of-neighbor ethic.

Our teaching profession always asks for the proper integration of the Church's social teaching in the program of catechist training and sewing of the social gospel in the various academic and catechetical curricula for children, youth and adults to indicate that one cannot be Catholic and racially or ethnically discriminating. Classroom and catechetical methods must ensure that we are sending into the world truly human,

⁵ *Brothers and Sisters To Us*, Pastoral Letter of the US Catholic Bishops on the topic of racism, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, Washington, DC, 1979

Catholic and socially conscious Christian to carry forward the Church as the *salt of the earth*.⁶

It helps to speak frankly about the visual and emotional dissonance we experience when a person of color or of lesser social class enters our space such that we fear losing the value of everything we have worked for and amassed. It helps to acknowledge that for most of those with whom we live and worship, contact with blacks, Latinos and others is restricted to the television, sports, the entertainment arts and certain of our employment environs, one or the other who crosses our major public thoroughfares or enters our grocery store or bank or sits in a desk in our classroom. And when the work day or school day is done we return to our neighborhoods that do not feature the presence of people of color. Our private lives of association, recreation, and worship are routinely lacking of diversity. And we see nothing wrong with this arrangement.

Workers for the Church as many of us are, we must be sensitive to overturn, as far as possible, an uncriticized pattern of an exclusive white environment in our parishes and other Church institutions and be conscious of welcoming and crafting diversity where we can that will be indicative of the Pentecost summons of the Church. When that diversity is absent, we should invite open reflection upon that reality and vocalize our anxiety about it, openly pray about it and make haste to reach to fellowship with other Catholics of a different hue living on the other side of expressways and highways, and railroad tracks and by street names and in neighborhoods pejoratively labeled.

In this effort we will be forming a new society that looks toward fulfillment of the kingdom. And in most church contexts we are the leaders in this *renewal of the face of the earth*.

American society today faces two-thirds of the world that is non-white and is asked to either welcome or reject the rest of the world. We cannot afford to ignore inclusion in these times except at our own peril and at the risk of living an expression of Church foreign to our pristine ordering.

For the longest stretch of the Catholic Church history in this country we have witnessed a number of outstanding individual lay and clergy members, champions of human and fundamental rights. The U.S. Bishops 1979 pastoral letter, *Brother and Sisters to Us*⁷ is the closest we come to a corporate strategy of the American Church to rid our parishes and institutions of racially biased practices.

This last November (2004) the bishops of the United States commemorated the 25th Anniversary of the pastoral letter, addressing racism and its impact on the Church. That annual meeting in Washington DC featured a special breakfast forum treating the broad-based implementation of this document and the bishops celebrated their opening conference mass with special African American punctuation.

⁶ Matthew 5, 13-14

⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, 1979: Pastoral Letter, *Brothers and Sisters to us*.”

Measuring ourselves against the aims of the Civil Rights laws the Church lags behind civic progress in the area of diversity. In individual instances of parishes, programs and ministries, we are a model for the rest of society. One might say our progress with diversity with Catholic Church is mixed.

It is absolutely marvelous where diversity is operative in our Church, i.e., where it is found in our parishes, schools, seminaries, campus ministries and other groupings. We feel a sense of accomplishment where this is happening, namely, that the Church is what it ideally what it should be. We sense the presence of grace among us. At the same time, it is disconcerting to see in many places where diversity is not in place to any degree. We have both experiences in our Church.

Some of the most vibrant and dedicated Catholics I meet in my ministry as a bishop are people like yourselves, - educators and students- who lead by raising people to great consciousness, greater response to the Lord we admire and love. You have the command of the learning environment. You have a critical view of world and societal events. You have a read on the strengths and weaknesses of political and social action former generations did not have. You are potentially prepared for lives of responsibility and adult behavior. You suggest to your peers and parents and grandparents new perspectives in human relating. You assist Christians, young and old, conjure empathy in face of some harsh social realities here and abroad. By reason of your social sensitivity and preference for the truth you can help Christians shed fears and superstitions attached to white privilege and that popular presumption of the inferiority of people of dark skin, the stranger, the foreigner. Socially minded Christian for these times will come from your environments, your classrooms, and your religious education and youth programs.

People of good will are found everywhere. We lose grasp on evangelical behavior when issues begin to press close to the threshold of our domestic scene, personal wealth and advantage. Then too often, class and racial distinctions surface their ugly heads and obfuscate gains credited to us previously. Such matters are not morally neutral but carry significant weight with our Christianity.

You and I are interested in social progress in society and in the Church. Christians should lead with the steady progress rather than co-opt the begrudging pace of social relating. The Church cannot afford to be even a step behind civic progress. We have to move beyond sampling each others' foods and attending each others' festivals and arrive at an attentive listening to one another's story, valuing one another's suffering pasts and present, contemplate each other's beauty as images of the Creator. We should lead with the Gospel message of neighborly regard and find it advantageous to live alongside one another.

Some of us have the skills and influence to advocate for change in real-estate practices, summon developers to socially conscious neighborhood development for a variety of economic ability so we can live, work and worship with one another. These efforts arise from evangelical attitudes teachers and religious educators, particularly, can sew within their craft of education.

Working with diversity prompts us to develop such virtues as patience, humility and respect for others and appreciate how God works through others.

St. Paul reminds us that the world consistently would divide the Church in opposing groups. Considering the divisions, separations, casts, and categories operative in the world, believers in Jesus are summoned to a harmony the world cannot fathom. Society would differentiate us as slave and free; male and female; Jew and Greek; *black and white*. But, Paul reminds us we are one in Christ Jesus where such distinctions are of no value.⁸ Christianity was the first community to experiment with bringing people together in a lived fellowship who were rich and poor; white and black, Jew and Gentile. It was a novel thing to do- mixing people together-, so unfamiliar to social standard that the infant faith was both admired and criticized. Remaining faithful to this mixing of peoples pledged to faith in Jesus Christ has been our greatest challenge over the millennia.

An ethic of inclusion and sharing of space does not erase the natural distinctions which are our spice. For some, only an erasure of distinctions in a melting-pot fashion will make life easier where all people are expected to subscribe to and adapt to what is deemed the dominant cultural pattern. It is supposed to be obvious to everyone which culture and which language are the norms. Rather, it takes courage to step aside for legitimate differentiation to surface as gift to the community. It takes every to insure the dignity and comfort of every person and allow their contribution to nurture growth in the group.

One great gift we give our children is an experience of the world as God has created this world. When I visit the parochial schools in Chicago I notice children today have colorful and decorative visual materials with which to learn, in contrast to our own day. Posters, textbooks, banners, classroom decorations often have one or the other black or brown or Oriental face amidst a pictured collection of children, -cartoon or real life. It occurs to me that this visual upgrade is odd if real children never or seldom experience interaction and friendship with the children of their pictures.

Similarly, if there is no racial variety found in our private space; if there is no racial variety among our children's friends; if there are no people of color active on our parishes, campuses and institutions we are living insulated lives, lives of exclusion.

IV

We cringe hearing the word "racist" or "racism". No one wants to be called "racist". Invariably we, unwittingly, fall into racist-type patterns absent the ability or the interest to change or rework our environment to be more evident of diversity.

Most people are not disturbed by one or two or three faces of color living in their neighborhood or parish or sitting in their classroom. It's when minority numbers grow to uncomfortable levels when people of good will begin to be cajoled by friends, neighbors

⁸ Galatians 3, 26-29

and relatives about the value of their property or the quality of their environment or insisting that they are unsafe when it never occurred to them before that they were anything but safe. I have observed this phenomenon ever since I was a boy growing up in Chicago. This phenomenon has not changed much since. Somehow we must believe in the greater value of our commingling in an environment that represents variety when and wherever this can occur...and eschew that culturalism that deems anything black or Hispanic to be inferior or despoiling of everything I have and own and wish to gain. Racial isolation nurtures fear and crime. Diversity and harmony shape a safe environment for everyone.

Overcoming racism is among the most powerful spiritual struggles of this society, represented by the battle to conquer our private selves and our penchant for individualism, skewed preferences, exaggerated privacy and prejudice, -- those sinful traces that mar the beauty of the Christian soul. What you and I fear most is apathy and the lack of evangelical attention to this unfinished business of America.

National parishes worked a couple generations ago where Catholics were nurtured in their own language and cultural ambience, separate from other Catholics even, the next block over who spoke a different language and had different customs. Today, we are increasingly multi-lingual parishes, scooting over to welcome and Spanish speaking, the Vietnamese speaking, the Polish speaking and the English speaking of different accents. We are challenged to higher levels of tolerance, multicultural education, precisely because we are Catholics. This is terribly Christian stuff, uniquely Catholic in focus while the implications of such social mixing are definitely abhorrent to some.

When we purchase a new home or move to another community we Americans prepare for it often as a step up in life. In addition, considering items like our need for quality schools, safe neighborhoods and real-estate value the racial profile of a community weighs heavily on our choices. Race is a peculiar item in the mix of considerations. It also is a disconcerting item in the sense that color or race factors in the choice of whether folks will choose or not to live next door to or down the street from a person like myself. What is the Christian message that impacts on this thought-to-be private choice among our American freedoms?

Race, class and safety concerns often emerge as some pretty powerful justifications that push aside Gospel inspirations toward more heroic Christian living. We've been struggling with this as Church and as a civic community for several generations. We have not quite conquered the problem. Panic selling, skewed speculations about real-estate value and the labor market have contributed further to the exodus of the white middle class from our cities and inner suburbs. This has incited rapid economic disinvestment and advanced the deterioration of neighborhoods that has proven impossible to overcome without the community simply dying and developers coming in much later and handing it back to whites. Is there not a better way to do this such that everyone has benefit of a quality of life?

We don't need any more laws. We need successful, volunteer efforts at harmony and living together. Unfortunately, many have lingering memories of forced integration through bussing which failed to win citizens, black and white, over to the values of greater levels of association among the races. Since the 1960 and 1970s the nation has become less racially balanced. The mood has resurfaced that neighborhood schools are the ideal. And for Catholics that means parishes defined by the racial demographics of their neighborhood and class are preferred. How can we raise children with diversity consciousness when they attend single-race schools?

Church leaders must continue to challenge this mood and encourage folks to more courageous discipleship when it comes to race relations. There is probably no topic that runs up against social resistance as does race and class in American society. Balances do not come natural to us. We tend to gravitate to that which is familiar and tend to fear that which is different – going so far as to deem that which is unfamiliar unworthy of our curiosity.

As I see it, education is a key building block. Unfortunately, most Catholics get their theology and information about the Church from newspapers, TV, the Internet and kitchen conversation at home. These kinds of information sources, however, are often biased and sensational. Many Catholics find themselves anxious about the counter-cultural posture of the Church in these times... wondering about their membership in a church that opposes certain popular trends. And our pastors, more often than not, go with the mood of their congregations. And in all this, most Catholics cannot be concerned about much beyond their personal lives and homes and one or the other newsworthy event that impacts their survival.

Our courageous witness, however, enlightens them with a new idea, the idea of the Christian message that frees them and enriches them. Our schools and religious education programs have a vital role to play in helping to build parishes and communities based on tolerance and respect. Our children and youth must be prepared for the human and social relations of these times or they will accuse us of having cheated them out of a real education to life and robbed them of the richness of life.

Our pedagogy cannot fail to direct the Gospel to the inner core of people's lives. It is never sufficient to speak in generalities and avoid the Word's piercing sword that cuts through the sluggishness of people's lives. Sunday Mass is not separate from the lifestyles we lead. Word and Eucharist carry direct messages about how we arrange our lives, interact with people, craft the virtues that guide our family lives and professions, how we view the world and analyze the information coming from daily newscasts, how we assess crime as well as good deeds in the community. Sin and virtue ... this is the stuff of teaching and religious education and direction in the Catholic context.

So, let us examine ourselves regarding those topics of daily life we avoid addressing for fear of disturbing people. If we avoid the topic of race the Gospel goes unproclaimed. Then we have sanitized and censored the Message. We have walked away from the prophetic dimension of our Catholicism for fear of losing standing with the classroom,

the audience, the Sunday assembly, friends, relatives, even fellow ministers. Courage and fortitude are two essential virtues of Christian social action. The aim of Catholic social teaching is to encourage an explicitly living and fruitful profession of our faith.

On this topic of race, we want to nudge people forward, soften their hesitancy, soothe their fears, remind them about the courage that lies within them that raises them to higher levels of the Christian life. People are essentially good. It behooves us teachers and preachers to remind them about the grace that lies within them... for a holier church, for a peaceful community, for a united citizenry, for a closer humanity.

The goal of our teaching and preaching is to form socially responsible Christians appreciative of racial and ethnic diversity by being ourselves bridge builders between people of differing races, cultures, and economic backgrounds.

V

Hospitality can be defined as offering a space when the stranger enters welcomed and feeling they have been in the company of friends. But, the way in which we receive a stranger is often influenced by perceptions, judgments and stereotypes that get in the way of our welcoming. Our natural inclination is to see that which is different as being lesser in value.

Parishes promoting diversity will allow newcomers to rearrange the furniture of the house a bit so they can be made to feel at home. No stranger or newcomer should be left on their own to either fit in or not basically because we have indicated nothing more than benign neglect of the person. Clearly, we honor God when we welcome the stranger.

Working in the vineyard we witness some marvelous things in the name of good will and blessing. One of those marvelous things is seeing people dwell together in peace. We affirm that and give it our best tilling in the name of encouragement and affirmation. There is also the other side when the broken part of human nature takes hold and people behave out of their fear and subliminal judgments about others.

As Church we have abundant power and resources to promote the ideals of equal opportunity in all aspects of church life. There is still a lot of work to be done.

All of us strongly support diversity. We must engage in a serious good faith consideration of workable policies and practices to promote the gift of diversity, making sure:

- 1) Diversity is sewn and made visible among our parish, campus, school and diocesan ministries.
- 2) The Church is a voluntary association. So, we end up working with who ever happens to be present and moving among us. This means too that the smaller constituencies will be less available in working numbers. So, we have to

aggressively reach out to the underrepresented while maintaining equal treatment of all.

- 3) No stranger walks in to worship with us who is not greeted and made to feel at home and invited to return.
- 4) Persons in our parish and campus ministries reflect the profile of our Jesus community, young and old, black and white, Hispanic, Asian, whatever the make-up.
- 5) No group considers themselves the owners of the parish or the school or other institution, not are they permitted to be the micro managers of parish life or the culture of the school even be they the founding gathers or founding mothers.
- 6) And we must reach out to the masses of unchurched people, whose work-a-day lives or poverty have positioned them on the margins of church and society, especially people of color who happen to be neighbors to our parishes and institutions. We need some examples of successful Christian communities of diversity that involve a network of church, real-estate and financial leaders, local politicians, and community organizers who see the value of this and wanting to make something like this work.

VI

In closing:

One of the more affirming experiences of humanity these days is a cruise – a popular American vacation pastime – 5 days, 7 days, 10 days or longer...the Caribbean Islands, Alaska, Panama Canal, Hawaiian Islands, Grecian Island or wherever. Over a thousand people having chose the same itinerary, but not their fellow passengers, are huddled together on a floating hotel; the average cruise representing a mixture of Americans, Europeans and the spice of smaller numbers of Asians, blacks and Hispanics.

The crew is often representative of Filipinos, Chinese, Caribbean Islanders, East Indians, Africans, and Continental Europeans.

The crew is trained to pamper you with kindness, all manner of pleasantries and service. A modicum of respect and global appreciation is necessary for a crew of this mix working in unison to serve a diverse audience of a couple thousand. Crew members wear their name-tags with print of their country of origin: Peru, Bolivia, Jamaica, Philippines, Uganda, Dominican Republic, China, Mexico, Viet Nam.

Passengers, although not the reason for cruising, are treated to a sampling of God's variety of people, facial icons and racial hues beyond anything they experience at home. Yet, everyone is wrapped around the same purpose for being on the boat, namely, to have a nice time away from the labor and worry and routine that's back home. So, there is a

measured oneness of spirit and alacrity among all. The environment is sage and supportive and festive.

By closer analysis, some cruisers are naturally cautious, holding on to their privacy. Some cruisers readily greet you hello or a smile; other pass you and say nothing and avoid even eye contact. Some break through the visual barriers of “stranger” and “foreigner” and strike up a conversation at pool side or breakfast nook or cocktail lounge or in the elevator. Here and there you find a stare from someone trying to figure out what you are: Hispanic, black American, Dominican, Puerto Rican – what are you?

The cruise itinerary, most often this side of the world, treats you to tapping the beauty of beaches, communities and terrain where native blacks and browns have lived for centuries or in instances thousands of years. These people of color are you maids, maitre-Ds, waiters and waitresses. These people make your beds, clean your toilets, and pour your wine, - all with human elegance.

No where else is found such a concentrated setting of different people for seven days or thereabouts. It is a snapshot of what could be in our neighborhoods for 365 days a year. Those of you who have taken a cruise can identify.

Bi-racial couples and families or whites mixing with, holding conversation with, laughing with blacks, or Asians are cause for sustained or second glances – not that anyone objects- we are beyond that feature of American apartheid of a bygone era – only such mixing is still novel. We take second looks because it is not the daily far of our domestic experience. It is a visual with still enough dissonance to move us to say from our stomachs: “yay” or “nay”.

In a true sense an experience of a vacation cruise is a step outside reality; an expensive one at that for the average traveler, but an experience of wonder and awe for several days of something that comes close to the way we should be living on land every day of the year.

There is no racial or ethnic separation on a vacation cruise ship. You are subject to be assigned to a cabin next door to someone who does not look like you. Some travelers may be fatigued by it all after a week and are anxious to get back home to what’s familiar.

My friends, our humanity carries with it definitions of insecurity and fear, byproducts of Original Sin. When we act out of our fear and insecurity it sometimes issues forth as bias and prejudice and racism. Jesus came and was defined within a despised race and died that we might have the courage to blur the lines of separation among us and see one another as brother and sister while he is Lord and Father.

As the Gospel pries into our prejudices, it calls on us to move out into places we had heretofore been unwilling to travel.

As the song we sing in Church goes...

Come, open your heart! Show your mercy to all those in fear! We are called to be hope for the hopeless so all hatred and blindness will be no more.

Sing, sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign and we'll walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love.

We are called to act with justice. We are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God!⁹

Thank you, each of you, for what you do to spread harmony and peace among all.

⁹ Haas, David, "We Are Called," from The Gather Hymnal: (Micah 6,8), 1988 GIA Publications, Inc. Chicago