

20th Sunday (A)

- Mahatma Gandhi in his autobiography tells how, during his student days, he read the Gospels & saw in the teachings of Jesus the answer to the major problem facing the people of India - the Caste system.
- Seriously considering to embrace the Christian faith, Gandhi attended a Christian church one Sunday morning intending to talk to the minister about the idea.
- On entering the church, however, the usher refused to give him a seat & told him to go & worship with his own people.
- Gandhi left the church & never returned: "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu."
- The belief that God's blessings are somewhat limited to peoples of certain nationalities or cultures has been around for a very long time.
- Such a belief was very much alive in the society in which Jesus grew up & persists today.
- Today's Scripture readings can be seen as setting up the contrast between "triumphalism" & "embracing", or "inclusion", which have been very much a part of the history of humanity in all places.
- Triumphalism is the attitude that says, "We are right, & they are wrong; we are better than they" – an excessive self-satisfaction in thinking that they are superior to others.
- Catholics have it with regard to Protestants; & Catholics & Protestants, both together as Christians, have it with regard to non-Christians - Muslims & Buddhists & Hindus, Jews, humanists & socialists & atheists & agnostics, & each of these exhibit triumphalist & superior attitudes towards one another.
- Triumphalism separates into groups of "us" & "them," & sees "us" as more favoured by God than "them."
- We have the truth, & they, at best, have only part of it, all mixed up in error; we have the sacraments & therefore more means of gaining grace; & they don't; we have a church authority that tells us what is right & wrong; & they don't, & so on.
- Triumphalism turns us in on ourselves & makes us more concerned about our own good than the good of others.
- Triumphalism is in reality, pride & selfishness in the guise of religion, or of patriotism when the issue is about race or nation.
- Being inclusive, on the other hand, is the spirit that says, "We are all brothers & sisters, one family under the one parenthood of God; God wills the salvation of all & Jesus affects that salvation equally & impartially for all."
- Being embracive or inclusive sees no group as more favoured by God than another.
- It tells us that belonging to God's chosen people does not mean that we are therefore better than other people who follow their own conscience & seek God in a different way.

- It calls for an open-minded respect for all who seriously follow their religious convictions, because it knows that in this way, they too participate fully in the one same salvation Jesus brought for the whole of humankind.
- Being embracive doesn't say "us" & "them"; it says "all".
- And this "**all**" of being embracive or inclusive is the very heart of the Gospel.
- The prophet Isaiah says "for **all** peoples."
- Paul says, "That God might have mercy upon **all**."
- And Matthew teaches this same truth of God's universal will of salvation for **all** by telling the astounding story of how Jesus is coerced, as it were, to extend salvation to a pagan woman, a non-Jew, an outsider, one not of the chosen people; being embracive is the very heart of the gospel.
- She doesn't accept the explanations of Jesus about his purpose in Israel; she doesn't accept the ethnic, political, religious & gender exclusion, but challenges him - it is then that Jesus breaks through his particular religious & cultural bias to respond to the need of a foreigner & pagan – her request coincides with God's will.
- All of us are aware of the atrocities being committed by terrorists.
- The slaughter of innocent people on the basis of their religion, ethnicity or race has horrified us all.
- We can hardly imagine the diabolical hatred between religious & ethnic groups which could lead to such descent into barbarism.
- And on a lesser scale, differences between ethnic or religious groups can lead to profound chasms of intolerance opening up between them.
- In Australia in more recent times the desire to demonise foreigners, especially asylum seekers, is very close to the surface of Australian life.
- There is great danger during these times of terrorist activities for the world at large have people categorise & demonise people of other cultures, religions & colours.
- The moral imperative for Christians & Catholics in particular, that flows out of the Eucharist, is to break down barriers – to listen & dialogue so that understanding & openness to one another may come about.
- We are reminded to do what we can to create a welcoming community to provide a spiritual home for those needing to know God's love.
- Let us help each other be open to be an instrument of God so that we become more loving, more forgiving, more gentle, more compassionate, more humble, more transparently pure & welcoming.
- Let us help each other so that our heart will be transformed into the Heart of Jesus, & that the face of our parish community may become more & more clearly the face of Jesus to reveal & not conceal, the authentic face of God.
- With the heart of Jesus, let us truly mean the opening prayer of our Mass for today – "Almighty God, ever-loving Father, your care extends beyond the boundaries of race & nation to the hearts of all who live. May the walls, which prejudice raises between us, crumble beneath the shadow of your outstretched arm".