

From the P.A.'s Desk

**Help Wanted:**

There is a need for the following ministries...

- Altar Servers
- Lectors
- Eucharistic Ministers
- Ushers
- Greeters of Hospitality

If anyone is interested in these ministries, please see Jerry Green. Training will be provided at the parish, and for Eucharistic Ministers, there are upcoming Diocesan Training Workshops in the area.

**Scripture Today:**

Our God loves everyone, while we who are loved often tend toward exclusivism. We espouse a “members only” outlook. Ours is a world where prejudice and discrimination abound; where nationalism, creed, color, gender, and age mean a great deal. We even extend our exclusivism to our faith community – and to our loving God.

Today’s readings treat the problem of exclusivism. They confront us in our class-conscious societies and urge us to put aside expressions like “second-class citizens.” They challenge us to be universal in our love for one another. They maintain that our God does indeed love everyone.

In his two-volume work (Luke and the Acts of the Apostles), Luke insists that the message of Jesus encompasses all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Whereas Matthew limits the genealogy of Jesus to Israel, Luke extends it to make Jesus a son of Adam, and thus all of humanity.

In this section of his Gospel, Luke stresses the need for ongoing commitment. Instead of speculating on the number to be saved, Jesus herein notes the effort needed to enter the kingdom. The “narrow door” indicates that it is not enough simply to have associated with Jesus. Salvation comes through commitment and action, not empty talk.

Believers all too readily erect barriers that limit access to God. Both in our society and in our faith community we may tend to think that certain social classes or groups of people have greater accessibility to our God. We exalt a class consciousness whereby “the lower classes” are

condemned to approach our God with greater difficulty. We thus divide the children of God into first-class and second class citizens, those who are “in” and those who are “out.” Over and over again in the Bible we are reminded that God chooses to live on the margins of life, among those who find it difficult to fit in anywhere. It would seem that Pope Francis sees this image clearly when he refers to the church as “a field hospital on the edge of the battlefield.”

The readings today call for a lifestyle in which we see each and every person as the handiwork of the Creator. Are there people in your life whom you judge to be inferior in some way, either intellectually, spiritually, morally, or physically? What do today’s readings say to you about attitudes of superiority?

### **Reaching Out:**

There is a parish near Louisville that has become so associated with the ministry to alienated and inactive Catholics that they earned the nickname, “The Parish of Misfit Toys.” The “Island of Misfit Toys” of course is that special place in the “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer Christmas Special,” where broken and defective toys were repaired so that they could be part of Christmas.

The parish which goes by that nickname does not promise to fix every problem that the alienated and inactive might have with the church, but they do promise a safe place to work on their problem or learn how to live creatively with it.

The pastor of the parish recently remarked: “Experience has taught me that great numbers of the marginal, disaffected, and rejected Catholics respond enthusiastically to a serious invitation to return to the church without condemnation. They don’t even expect the high ideas of the church to be changed. All they want is a safe place to bask in God’s unconditional love and a chance to turn their lives around without judgment. If the church is truly catholic—universal and inclusive—we can always come home. Prodigal children still want to return.”

What is so amazing about the parish (“of Misfit Toys”) is that its reputation spread throughout the diocese and now brings inactive and alienated Catholics to them from sixty-seven zip codes.

I have always admired that parish and its attempts at reaching out to the marginalized. I have often wondered how wonderful it would be for a parish to be known by such a name. In an age of cynicism, self-righteousness and indignation, I suspect that God would be pleased with such a parish too.

May we continue as a universal church, diocese, parish, and individuals, to look for ways to create a safe place in our church for people looking for a new home, or a return to their old one. How will you evangelize this week?