

Homily for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Alice Walker, best known for her book “The Color Purple” also wrote a story called “The Welcome Table.” It is a thought-provoking tale about a wretchedly poor black woman who goes to church on a Sunday morning to stand around that “welcome table” where all Christians worship. She wears her best clothes and, although quite old, has walked nearly a half-mile drawn by the glittering cross on the church steeple. What mars this simple act of love and piety is that she is a tad forgetful and a bit blind. Sadly, she has come to the wrong church. She has arrived at the “white” church and without intending it has broken the barrier that keeps racial peace.

The minister reminds “Auntie” at the door that this is not her place and the usher tells “Grandma” that she must leave. She pays no attention to either. Finally the “good” women of the congregation make the men do their duty by literally picking her up and taking her out of the church.

Undaunted the woman continues walking in her journey to find the right church, to find a true “welcome table.” While on the dusty road her heart is filled with joy as she meets Jesus who looks just like the picture of the Tender Shepherd that hangs over her bed. And He comes to

her and says... “Follow me.” Suddenly she feels like she could walk forever and finds great joy in traveling next to the Master.

Alice Walker ends her story with these words: “The people in the church never knew what happened to the old woman; they never mentioned her to one another or to anybody else. Most of them heard sometime later that an old colored woman fell dead along the highway. Silly as it seems, it appeared she had walked herself to death.”

How we look at the world – our attitude – is what determines how we act and respond to others. Attitudes manifest themselves in many different ways. Some in public life have a defiant attitude and some are irreverent. Many parents think their teenagers always have an attitude. And, of course, many teenagers just assume that their parents were born with an attitude intended to create some personal form of torture aimed at them.

But those attitudes are miniscule compared with the many different attitudes that infect our world and make it a very sad place. The racism in the story today is not something we are unaware of. Racism abounds in our country. Women in our world are often treated as second class citizens. Homophobia and xenophobia (the fear of people of other nationalities) are destructive attitudes we find everywhere. And how

many bad attitudes are there toward the handicapped, the challenged, the poor and the poorly educated.

Jesus in the Gospel has an answer to these attitudes. He says: “This is not to happen among you.” For us, the only acceptable attitude is to “serve the rest” and “the needs of all.” This is the only attitude to follow because it is the attitude of the servant who comes not to be served but to serve everyone else.

May we who gather each week around the “welcome table” of the Lord be like the old woman in the story. May we learn to walk joyfully with the Master. May we run away from the glittering attitudes of our world and learn to live the simple attitude of caring for and respecting each other and seeing that in the eyes of God we are all one.