



Immaculate Conception  
Church

## Homily for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A 2014

When I was working at the National Shrine of Our Lady of The Snows in St. Louis, I developed the healthy habit of swimming a half mile every day. The pool was close to where I lived. It became my habit to leave the Shrine around 11:30 AM, drive to the pool, go into the locker room, change up and be ready for the Noon-time swim.

One day I arrived at the pool and discovered all the people with whom I shared the pool each day congregating in the lobby. They were waiting to go into the locker room. Perplexed, I asked the manager of the center if there was a problem in the locker room. "No," she said. "You can go in"....and then she added these words "if you have the courage to." It seemed strange but it certainly didn't slow me down. I immediately walked into the locker room and to my shock discovered why everyone else was waiting. The room was filled with a group of gentlemen who were changing up. They were all black. I understood what was happening. I was experiencing racial prejudice. As I stood in the locker room getting changed to go for my daily swim, an elderly gentleman walked in. He looked at me and said "Stupid fools, aren't they?" He was referring, of course, to the men waiting in the lobby.

So it was that I began my journey of discovery when I learned that prejudice and hatred were thriving in the Midwest. I saw it everywhere and came to realize that something I had never experienced in the East was thriving in the Mid-west. In the past few weeks the news about Ferguson brought back all my memories of my time in St. Louis.

The sad truth is that prejudice and hatred, disdain for those whom we might consider "different", are thriving in our country, in our culture and in our world. We are watching an explosion of it everywhere...here at home, in Israel, in Syria, in Iraq. The cause and the victims may be different in each place, but the result is consistently and sadly the same. To be "different" in the way we look, the identity that we live or the belief system we call our own often becomes an invitation to suffer the violence and pain of prejudice in all its varied forms.

The readings today are about our relationship with other people. Ezekiel speaks of forgiving the evil in others so that they might change the direction of their lives. Ezekiel is begging us to work to end the evil that we find in ourselves and in others so that we might help God create a better world. St. Paul speaks of the healing power of love that should be the dominant force of our relationships with others. St. Paul has no room for hatred or division...they serve only to destroy the vision of the reign of God in our lives. And Jesus in the Gospel encourages us to mend our relationships...to forgive each other rather than alienate ourselves from each other. Jesus encourages us to heal division and separation in order that we might work together to establish unity and peace.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "If we do not learn to live together as brothers, we will die together as fools." The condition of so many places in our world today only serves to give ample evidence to that truth. We must learn to live differently or we will destroy each other. We can only learn to live differently when our lives rest in God and prejudice and hatred are given no room to exist. The truly sad thing is that for some their concept of "God" becomes the fuel for hatred.

On this weekend when we honor the place of Mary in our lives and in the life of our parish, I would remind all of us of the words Mary spoke at the wedding feast in Cana. She said simply: "Do whatever he tells you." I think Mary is saying the same words to us today. I think Mary is telling us to listen to Christ in the Gospel and learn to put away hatred and division in order to establish peace and unity in our lives and in the lives of all God's people.