

Come To Me

Once again in today's Gospel, from Matthew, Jesus seems to be turning our way of thinking upside down! Remember last week: Jesus said "Whoever loves mother, father, daughter or son more than me - is not worthy of me...".

This week, he is saying that God's revelation – God's message – will be given and understood, not by the wise and learned – not by the priests and scholars; but by the "little ones:" the unlearned ... the simple... .

You can imagine how the pillars of the Synagogue reacted to those remarks! ...but just what was Jesus trying to get at??

The priests, the scribes, the scholars Jesus was speaking about were the teachers of the law – the "high priests" – they were the small minority holding all the social and religious power in Jesus' time. These self-important, self-assured, self-righteous 'religious,' despised the "little ones" ... who in those days were: the poor, the hungry, the afflicted, the sick, ... children, the non-invited, the excluded...; 'sheep without a shepherd, ... a whole group of people considered "the poor of the nation."

What Jesus is saying is that *the despised of the world are actually the ones preferred by God; they're the ones who "get it," who are able to hear God's voice. Your job – religious leaders – is to serve them, help them, accompany them, learn from them in their suffering from injustice; and together you will become the people God created you to be.'* Catholic social teaching today calls this a *preferential option* for the poor... "the little ones."

Pope Francis says the Church should be like a "field hospital" – assisting the wounded and hurting; and one of his deep concerns is that the Hierarchy, the bishops and priests, like the religious leaders of Jesus', time are lording their power and prestige over people... rather than serving them. Every time Pope Francis talks to bishops and priests he warns them about the evils of clericalism and reminds them that their position in the Church is not one of power and privilege, but rather service.

Once again Jesus and Pope Francis are turning the conventional way of thinking side down!

+++++

A great example of how the Spirit can work to cut through the layers of injustice and privilege and exclusion in Church and society is the story of the life of Father Augustine (Gus) Tolton, the first Black priest in the United States, whose anniversary of death is today: July 9, 1897.

Augustine was born on April 1, 1854, into slavery in Missouri – one of four children in his family. The family served the Eliots, who were Catholic, and as was the custom, had all their slaves baptized into the Faith. Augustine's father died in the Civil War and when Augustine was seven, his mother took the four children to

freedom – crossing the Mississippi River in a dangerous trek , ducking gunshots... and finally arriving in Quincy, Illinois – which was free territory with access to underground railroad.

When Augustine was 9, he went to work in a tobacco factory in Quincy, rolling cigars 10 to 12 hours a day, while enduring the evil of prejudice and racism on a daily basis. Amazingly, when they arrived in Quincy, the family was embraced by the local Pastor, an American Irish priest: Father Peter McGuire, who had come to America at age 15 during the Irish potato famine, and therefore knew something about prejudice himself. Augustine went to St. Boniface – an all white, Catholic, segregated school – to the outrage of the white parents. The Pastor and religious Sisters received threatening letters, but Father Peter and the Sisters held fast. Augustine was a brilliant student and eventually felt called to priesthood, but no seminary in the United States would accept him because he was black. But the Parish priest was able to get him into a seminary in Rome, that was for international seminarians from across the world preparing for the missions. He was ordained a priest April 24, 1886 and, surprisingly, the Bishop in Illinois allowed him to be a priest of the Diocese where he had grown-up. [Interesting to note that it wasn't until the 1950s that there was a black priest in Syracuse.] Fr. Tolton soon gained a great reputation as a fine preacher and was even drawing many German and Irish Catholics to a parish meant for blacks!

Unfortunately racism and jealousy raised their ugly heads: his fellow priests referred to his church as “the n--- -- church” and referred to him as “the n----- priest,” because they were losing parishioners and income. Father Gus was forced to minister only to blacks, and any donations that came from whites, had to be returned to white parishes.

Father Gus's died of sunstroke at the young age of 43 and according to the newspapers, his funeral drew massive crowds of both black and white folks; with a procession that stretched for four blocks.

He was allowed burial in a white Catholic Cemetery, but placed deep in the ground so that a white priest could be buried above him..., his name was inscribed on the *back side* of the Cross marking the grave!

Over 100 years later the Archbishop of Chicago in 2010 set in motion the process of Father Tolton's canonization and he will be made an official Saint of the Catholic Church.

+++++

“What God has hidden from the wise and learned, God has revealed to the little ones.

One of the blessings of our Parish, is that our community is diverse with sisters and brothers from around the world and from across the continuum of racial and ethnic identities, sharing their faith and gifts for the building up of the reign of God. One family is the Criollos, originally from Ecuador, who joined Our Lady of Solace Parish upon arriving in Syracuse. José and Ziolla with their children: Jason and Talia, handle the cleaning, maintenance and repair of our building and property. At this time, they – with our Charles Clinton to assist in translation – are here to share a message regarding their Parish back in their home in Ecuador... with an invitation for our participation in helping to rebuild the church in the rural community.

[Note: To date All Saints parishioners have contributed over \$5,000. to assist in rebuilding the 100 year old Church of Santa Marianita de Jesús.]