NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 19, 2008 The Peace Pulpit

I thought that we could best understand and reflect on today's scriptures if I shared with you an article that I read just a day or so ago in the *Michigan Catholic* of this week. The headline of the article is "Professor Stunned by Refusal of Communion." The article goes on to speak about the "Pepperdine law professor Douglas Kmiec, a constitutional lawyer who often writes on religion in the public square."

But this time when he had given a speech in which according to the article, he told how he supported one of the Presidential candidates, Obama, he said, because of his "remarkable 'love thy neighbor' style of campaigning, his expressed desire to transcend partisan divide, and specifically, his appreciation for faith."

This man, Professor Kmiec, was known as the architect of the Reagan administration stance against abortion. He had been a keynote speaker at the March for Life's Annual Rose Dinner. Yet because he admired Senator Obama because of his "remarkable 'love thy neighbor' style," and his attempt to "transcend partisan divide" and so on, in the Mass that took place, the priest from the pulpit condemned him, then at communion time, refused to give him Holy Communion.

Now this is a man who has pro-life credentials that exceed probably anything we have done. Yet because this priest thought that he was supporting someone who was not for abortion but for choice, he would condemn him, refuse to give him Holy Communion.

It's typical of what has been happening in our church, where church leaders, even priests, are choosing to be judges over others, judging their consciences and deciding 'you may or may not receive Holy Communion,' 'you are or you're not worthy-I will decide.' It's amazing that this would happen to a person like Professor Kmiec.

In this instance, Cardinal Mahony, the archbishop of the diocese where it happened, did challenge the priest and tell him it was wrong to do such a thing. Though Cardinal Mahony himself, only within the last two weeks had also decided "certain people aren't worthy to be in my diocese and speak." I'm referring to Bishop Jeffrey Robinson, who was refused the opportunity to speak in the diocese of Los Angeles, a bishop who was in fully good standing with the Catholic Church, but because he was speaking on an issue that Cardinal Mahony thought should be dealt with otherwise, he was refused.

All of this is something that's happening within our church that I think is totally contrary to what we hear about Jesus in today's scriptures.

Take the gospel lesson, first of all, how Matthew says, "Jesus was moved with compassion." He wasn't moved with a sense of judgment or condemnation but compassion. One of the scripture commentators that I consulted this week points out how the word "compassion," in both Greek and Hebrew, has the root meaning of "womb," so it calls forth the idea of nurturing, sustaining love, and that is so clear about Jesus, isn't it?

He was a person who was filled with compassion, nurturing, life-sustaining love. His attempt was to go out and bring back, as he said, "the lost sheep of Israel." Don't condemn them, don't push them away because they've fallen short. Draw them back.

In fact, in today's gospel, Matthew points out Jesus set up a group of 12 to be a foundation for his community of disciples. It wasn't, as we perhaps have come to think, a set of bishops who were to be over the others. That wasn't who the 12 were at all. He had designated the 12 because that would be symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel. At the point in time when Jesus was alive, those 12 tribes had been split for hundreds of years -- 10 tribes in the north and they had been lost to history, two tribes in the south and even including the Samaritans, who were half Jewish and half Gentile. Jesus said, "Bring them all back."

So setting up a group of 12 was symbolic of trying to make the Jewish people whole again, the way they were when God spoke to Moses in the desert and called them to be his people, his chosen possession, what we heard about in the first lesson today. Jesus wanted that to happen again. "Bring back those lost sheep, bring everybody together in a spirit of love," so he sends the disciples out to heal, to proclaim the good news, "the reign of God is at hand, come, come back!" That was the approach of Jesus.

What St. Paul tells us today also is so clear: God is a God of love and that love of God is poured into our hearts, not when we are worthy of it -- we don't come to Holy Communion because we are worthy of it and that's a gift, a prize that we receive -- no, we come because God's love is drawing us. Jesus is a God of love and it's especially, as Paul points out, when we are sinners, that that love of God is extended to us.

So isn't it clear how wrong it is that within our church, we're getting to the point where we want to condemn this group or that group, this person or that person, instead of being welcoming, a loving community that draws people to us?

I think we have a long way to go. I can think of a number of areas where we would bar people from Holy Communion. We make judgments about them.

I think of how, within the last two weeks, there's a new decree from Rome condemning women who have in any way participated in ordination of women, Instead of listening to what's happening in the world around us, and instead of accepting the fact that there's nowhere in the gospels that says women can't be ordained; instead of listening to women and why they want to enter into roles of servant leadership in the church, we condemn them, excommunicate them. I think that's wrong, very wrong, if you take into consideration the way Jesus was. He could have condemned those from the chosen people who had left and gone away and had gotten mixed up in pagan religions. Instead, he said, "Go, bring them back. I love them."

That's the way our church should be.

So every one of us, I think, has a responsibility to look into his or her heart and ask, "How am I in relationship to others? Am I a person who welcomes people and helps this parish community to be an inclusive community, where we wouldn't turn anyone away, or would draw people because we love them and want them to share more deeply in the love of God?"

I hope that we would try to become like that and get rid of any kind of barriers -- and you can think of the ones, economic barriers, sexual orientation barriers, male/female barriers, racial barriers -- all of those barriers we've set up at times and some of us have that attitude, "exclude." Instead of that, if we listen carefully to the scriptures of today, we discover a God who eliminates barriers, and that's made especially clear in Jesus, God's son, who came to us to be the very visible image of the invisible God.

That love of God is poured into our hearts when we're sinners, so we ought to extend that love of God to every other person and try in our public life, our family life and our parish life, always to draw people to ourselves so we build up the reign of God which is a reign of love, bringing all people together as sons and daughters of God, sharing in the life of Jesus, God's son.

If we can become that kind of inclusive community and inclusive people, the reign of God will be very much closer than it's been before.

[Bishop Gumbleton gave this homily at St. Hilary Parish in Redford, Mi.]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-31 07:52*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/eleventh-sunday-ordinary-time