

“DIFFERENCES VS. DIVISIONS”

SUNDAY ORDINARY 26 B

FOR SEPTEMBER 27, 2009 – CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Everywhere we look, anywhere we go,
we encounter differences.

Different cultures.
Different ethnicities.
Different opinions.
Different religions.

In general, differences don't bother us too much
until they come walking through our front door
and we're forced to deal with them

For instance:

Someone from another religion marries into your family.

The part-time minister at the place where you work
invites you to join a Bible study on Wednesday mornings
in the break room.

The son or daughter in whom you invested 12 years of Catholic education announces that he or
she no longer believes in God.

When it comes to matters of the heart and soul,
these differences can quickly turn into divisions.

Remember in our first reading from Numbers?

Eldad and Medad weren't there when the Lord
bestowed the spirit on the seventy elders,
so Joshua pleaded with Moses – “Moses, my lord,
stop them. They weren't there with the others,
they're different.”

It even shows up in the gospel:

“Lord, that man over there is not of our company,
tell him to quit doing good things in your name.
He's a stranger and we question his credentials.”

Move from the gospel book to the history book
and you'll see the tragic story of all the wars

fought in the name of religion.

Move from the history book to the nightly news
and you'll hear heated rhetoric of religious division
grabbing lead stories in our own day.

But please - don't stop there.
Go on to the **GOOD** news
found in the words of Jesus who reminds us today that
differences are not the same as division.

Evidently, people in Jesus' day were the same as people today,
at least when it comes to the power and influence of sin.
I'm talking in particular about that temptation
that snags otherwise religious people
and seduces them into turning differences into divisions.

Like most other sins,
it's so easy to do...
this drawing a line between
right belief and wrong belief.

Like most sins,
it feels so good...
that feeling of pride that convinces you
that you've staked your claim
on the right side of the division.

Drawing a line is serious business.

In post 9/11 America,
we're tragically aware of what happens
when lines are drawn in hatred and fear.

Two weeks ago we commemorated the eighth anniversary of that terrible day.

I'm sure you watched some of the programs
and read some of the articles reflecting on it.

The most striking article that I read
was written by Peggy Noonan.

The title of her article was, "I Just Called to Say I Love You."¹

Her words focused, not on the images of destruction from that day, but on the words of love.

She writes this (and I quote):

“I think too about the sounds that came from within the buildings and within the planes—the phone calls and messages left on answering machines, all the last things ever said to whoever was home and picked up the phone. I’m in awe of those messages.”

Thirty-one-year-old Melissa Harrington,
California-based trade consultant
attending a meeting in the twin Towers
called her father to say she loved him.

Minutes later she left a message on the answering machine
as her new husband slept in their San Francisco home,
“Sean, it’s me. I just wanted to let you know that I love you.”

Captain Walter Hynes of the New York Fire Department dialed home and left this message:
“I don’t know if we’ll make it out.
I want you to know that I love you and I love the kids.”

Something terrible had happened, Noonan goes on to say.
Time was short, life was reduced to its essentials.
She reminds her readers that there is no record of anyone calling to say, “I never liked you,” or
“You hurt my feelings.

Amazingly, or not, there is no record of anyone damning the terrorists or saying, “I hate them.”

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist today, Msgr. Val will say:
“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” And we reply:
“It is right to give Him thanks and praise.”

The words that follow that exchange talk about God’s
continuing presence even in the midst of conflict
and division. They speak of vengeance giving way
to forgiveness. Listen carefully to that preface.

Differences are a God-given reality in our world.
Drawing lines and creating divisions is our choice.

But we also have another choice: love.
And love is of God. ²

¹ The Wall Street Journal, “I Just Called to Say I Love You,” by Peggy Noonan, September 8, 2006.

² From a homily by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer 2006