

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YR C

August 22, 2010

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
Rev. Jeff McGowan

1ST READING: ISAIAH 66: 18-21

I come to gather all nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.

PSALM 117

Go out to the world and tell the Good News.

2ND READING: HEBREWS 12:5-7, 11-13

Endure your trials...make straight the paths you walk on...be healed.

GOSPEL: LUKE 13:22-30

People will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and will take their place at the feast in the kingdom of God.

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Did you notice the difference in town this week? University students are unpacking vans and waving good-bye to family. We're a year older and they are the same age, but they make us *feel* young. This week always brings back memories of an encounter I had in the grocery store years ago. I was checking the eggs in a carton by turning them and noticed a college age kid watching me and she started turning the eggs in her carton as well. She looked back at me and said, "What's the prize?"

What would it feel like to get to heaven's door and find it locked? What would it feel like to knock and hear Jesus say, "I do not know where you are from." Jesus will never force the vengeful to be forgiving or the judgmental to be compassionate or the selfish to be generous. But there are consequences.

We are comfortable with some people but not with others. We ask questions like: "Where are you from?" "What do you like to do?" "What teams do you root for?" Some might ask: "Are you saved?" I'll share something very personal here: When I was in third grade, my family moved into our permanent home. I was standing with my dad watching the moving people unloading their truck when the next door neighbor walked over. He welcomed us and soon began telling my dad the Presbyterian Church was on the next street and the Episcopal Church was a few blocks away. My dad said, "We'll be going to St. Lawrence, we're Catholic." He said, "OH." That was all. But even in third grade I

got it. Religious intolerance has a personal significance for me. I can only imagine what it was like for Fr. Kaz to grow up with the Communist regime in Poland. Have you ever experienced religious intolerance? Are you noticing religious intolerance in our town and our country?

Our comfort zone either welcomes people or not. I read once that when we set our thermostats we establish a comfort zone. When the temperature rises above the comfort zone the AC starts running. When we're within the comfort zone the AC doesn't do anything, they call that the "dead zone". When we refuse to expand our comfort zones, we are living in the dead-zone not the Kingdom of God. There are three great Biblical religions and all are seeking God. The Jews have the Torah, which is a way of life they follow; Islam has the Koran, which is rules and expectations they follow; and Christians have the New Testament but we do not follow the Book. We follow Jesus of Nazareth; the Risen, Living, Jesus Christ. Things may be bad for us personally. We may be going through a tough time, things may seem terrible now; but we know Jesus is on board and we will rise again. We don't really expect God to take us out of the mess we are in but we do expect him to enter into our mess and bring resurrection. Paul tell us to endure our trials, follow Jesus and we will be healed. His way is compassion, forgiveness, and unrelenting hope. The real Jesus expands our comfort zone; if that is not our experience of Jesus, we're following an imposter and we'd be fools to expect that Jesus would recognize us when we're knocking at heaven's door.

Through the waters of Baptism we are plunged into the mission of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. As soon as we emerge from the water, we are given a candle. The candle is lit from the Easter candle that symbolizes Christ, our light in this world. It is not for nothing that this light is passed to the newly baptized Christian. The light of Christ is ours to bring into our community, to our nation. It is the light of justice; it is the light of freedom; it is about the hope we share and the love between all of us who are caught in the tragic midst of ethnic, economic, and religious bigotry. There is unfathomable power in that light. Wherever people give up personal agendas and expand personal comfort zones to reach out in kindness and peace to others, the light of Christ is present. The

world grows brighter. It is the light of the Kingdom; the light of forgiveness, the light of compassion, the light of generosity, the light of the Good News!