

28th Sunday Cycle C

10-10-10

In May, I was asked to give the final benediction at the National Day of Prayer service. It's an annual, patriotic event at the Courthouse in Batavia. I decided to take a bit of a risk and pray as a Catholic, and so my prayer began: "God, our Father, you love every country just as much as our own." *I heard someone gasp.* The prayer continued, "We do not ask that You protect our way of life, but that we embrace your way of life."

And perhaps Catholic Americans gasp today when we realize that God healed Naaman, a non-believing foreigner, and a Samaritan, a wrongly-believing foreigner. *God, you love every country as much as the United States; and you love every person just as much as you love each of us here at St. Bernadette.* That's a hard prayer!

God cured Naaman of leprosy. Naaman was the military commander of Syria. And Syria had been at war with Israel for centuries. Only 35 years earlier, a Syrian soldier had killed the King of Israel with an arrow! And now God heals the military commander of the enemy of Israel—and does it in Israel's Jordan River!

And in St. Luke, we hear about yet another "good Samaritan." You will recall that Jews hated Samaritans because they had intermarried with the invaders, and because they worshipped on the wrong mountain. Not only does Jesus heal the hated Samaritan, this "foreigner" is the only one to return and thank Jesus.

Nobody wants to hear about God caring for our enemies. It seems like human nature for people to think that their religion, their country has all the truth.

Right now there is a nationwide discussion about whether there should be a Muslim-free zone around Ground Zero, and how big that Islam-free zone might be. Five years ago, the town of Cooper City, Fla. denied Jews the right to build an outreach center to serve local college students. Ten years ago, the citizens of Belmont, Mass. sued to halt construction of Mormon Temple in their town. Our own Mariemont has no Catholic Church because many years ago, the wealthy owner of the property refused to allow it, so I'm told.

Quick story about Islam. This summer on vacation, I visited a waterpark and stood at the bottom of one of those long watery tubes, watching young people whooshing out and making a big splash. Some of those swimsuits used 3 square inches of fabric at most! Then the next whoosh: a woman in long black slacks, black long sleeves, a tight scarf over her hair, and a lace shawl over her shoulders. A Muslim, having fun at a water park. And I looked at her. Not so different than me.

Anyway, we're Catholics, a word that means universal. Not a national religion but worldwide, far older than most nations, including our own; not tied to any one political or economic system. We don't believe that only Catholics can be saved, or that God's grace works only through our Church. We look for goodness everywhere, including Protestant churches, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish temples,

and mosques. We believe there is holiness in every country, even the most distant or violent.

And perhaps at the gates of heaven, Protestants will welcome Catholics; and Muslims will greet Jews; and Hindus will embrace Buddhists; and Catholics will open the gates for Mormons; and, by the mercy and grace of Jesus, perhaps someone will open the door for each of us!