

Homily - October 24, 2020

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We celebrate God who invites us through St. Paul, to help grow the Body of Christ, building it up in love, by using the gifts given to each of us. We often are not aware of how much God has enriched us to carry out such a sacred task. So we confidently call upon our compassionate God, Lord have mercy.

St. Paul encouraged us by saying, “Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ... for building up the Body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith...” As I reflected on St. Paul’s statement, I recalled Ms. Ayan Omar, a Muslim woman whom I got to know in an interfaith dialogue group in St. Cloud, Minnesota. She is a teacher in Tech high school in St. Cloud. She played an important role in teaching her very diverse group of students how to interact well in their very diverse academic world. She wanted her students to become skilled in living happily in the wider diverse world they faced.

So, she invited her students to organize cultural events. In one of the first of those events, the students invited one another to bring an ethnic dish. On the event day, students took turns at their various tables to describe what the food was, what they named it and why she or he liked it and chose it for the others. The event was a great success in helping the students know and appreciate one another. I believe that Ms. Omar was building up the Body of Christ, albeit, she would not use that same language, though she readily admitted that she was inspired often by the good example of Jesus, whom Muslims believe to be a most important prophet.

Today’s Gospel reminds us that when bad things happen to us or others, such as during this pandemic—someone becomes ill or even dies with COVID-19...we human beings often tend to think, “I must have done something wrong to deserve this” or “they must have done something wrong to deserve this,” or “God must be punishing me/them.” Jesus tries to dispel such premature judgmental conclusions. Nonetheless, he doesn’t let us off the hook. He invites us to use an accident or disaster as a great moment to examine ourselves as fruitful or barren fig trees. Yes, maybe I got COVID-19 because I wasn’t careful. If clearly so—I can admit it and tell others how most likely I got it so that those who hear my story may be prompted to be more careful.

As members of the Body of Christ, we can listen to help calm others during significant difficulties and invite them to set aside the fear-filled or guilt-ridden trap of negative and misdirected judgment when awful things happen. When we do so, we help the Body of Christ grow in love. Simultaneously, we begin to bear fruit, rather than being a “barren fig tree.”