

Eighteenth Sunday of the Year

(Cycle B)

READING I: Exodus 16:2-4,12-15 **DATE:** 08/01-02/2009
READING II: Ephesians 4:17,20-24* **PLACE:** Corpus Christi
GOSPEL: John 6:24-35 **TIME:** 4:00 p.m.; 9:30 a.m.
EVENT: mass

THEME: To speak the truth is an act of faith. We will only be able to address issues of race, gender, and culture if we have the faith that truth will lead us to righteousness and holiness.

I. Race, Gender & Culture

- President Obama shared a beer this week with Professor Henry Louis Gates and Sergeant James Crowley after the President’s comments escalated Gates’ arrest into a series of charges and countercharges of racism and Harvard elitism.
- Earlier in the month, Delaware Congressman Mike Castle was shouted down at a town meeting when a white woman insisted that Barack Obama was not a natural born citizen and therefore not the legitimate President of the United States, and, to the cheers of the all-white crowd, she demanded her country back.
- The Senate Judiciary Committee, with one exception, voted along party lines to recommend Sonia Sotomayor for the Supreme Court amid concerns that her remark about wise Latina judges indicated that she might not be an impartial jurist.
- For one of the coolest summers on record on the Eastern Seaboard, there sure has been a lot of heat generated by the issues of race, gender, and culture.

II. Ephesians

- Of course, there’s nothing really new about all of this.
- Prejudice and chauvinism have long been a part of human history.
- They bring out the ugliest in people, tear whole communities apart, and set one group of people over another – all because of the fear and hatred of “the other.”
- It’s one of the issues behind Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.
- Throughout the early Christian community, Jewish converts to Christianity and Gentile converts to Christianity struggled to live together.
- Long-held animosities and different ways of living had to be addressed, if the community of believers was to live together as one body in Christ.
- In the passage from the letter that we hear today, Paul addresses the issue.

- He tells the Ephesians that they must “put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires.”
- Instead, they must “put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.”
- Many scholars believe that Paul’s language of “putting away the old self” and of “putting on the new self” may be an early reference to the Christian baptismal rite, in which individuals shed their clothes, were immersed in water, and then clothed as a new creation in Christ.
 - If that is the case, then Paul is appealing to the people’s baptism.
 - Because only in their baptism can they leave behind the “futility [or emptiness] of their minds” and become “renewed in the spirit of [their] minds.”

III. Putting Away Falsehood

- The key to understanding this passage in light of today’s controversies is not so much in believing that, now that we are baptized, we can simply put away our old ways of prejudice for new ways of loving.
 - Would that it were so easy.
- The key to the passage comes in Paul’s conclusion, which, oddly enough, is omitted from the lectionary version that we read.
 - After admonishing the Ephesians to put away their old self and to put on a new self in Christ, Paul concludes his passage in this way:
 - “Therefore, putting away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members one of another.”
- For Paul, the solution to moving from the old to the new is to be found in the truth.
 - In our willingness to acknowledge the truth, and in our willingness to speak the truth.
 - In our confidence that, as members of the Body of Christ, we have nothing to fear from the truth.
- When it comes to race, gender, and culture in our society, acknowledging and speaking the truth seems to be one of the biggest barriers.
 - White men are concerned that a Latina judge will allow her experiences to influence her decisions, but they cannot acknowledge that white men’s experiences have been influencing them since the foundation of the Republic.

- A white woman wants her country back from a perceived foreign president, when it's more likely that her sense of security as part of a white culture is threatened by the election of a black President.
- The President uses emotionally charged language in response to the arrest of a black Harvard professor and he is accused of opposing law enforcement officials, when maybe he's just responding to an issue that hits a little too close to home.

IV. Speaking the Truth

- We'll never be able to address the issues of race, gender, and culture in our society until we are willing to speak truthfully about them.
- And speaking truthfully about them requires an ability to talk about emotions, as well as perceptions, as well as facts.
- It requires the ability to listen to the painful experiences of others, as well as to acknowledge the difficult realities about ourselves.
- Speaking truthfully about race, gender, and culture in our country requires faith.
- Because only when we have faith that the truth is nothing to fear can we let go of the deceitful lies we tell ourselves when we confront the ugliness in our own lives.
- Only when we have faith that our baptism joins us safely to the Body of Christ, can we take the risk of clothing ourselves in the righteousness and holiness of truth.

V. Conclusion

- To speak the truth is an act of faith.
- With an African American as President of the United States and a wise Latina judge on her way to the Supreme Court, our country cannot avoid the issues of race, gender, and culture.
- The question is whether we can address them honestly.
- For us, as baptized Christians, we must strive to put away our old self, corrupted through deceitful desires, and put on a new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.
- Therefore, putting away falsehood, let us all speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members one of another.