

## Sunday before Lent Year C

**Reading:** 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43, Galatians 1:1-12, Luke 7:1b-10 Psalm 96:1-9

**Theme:** *The Tunnel Vision*

*"For I tell you, most solemnly; not even in Israel have I found such faith."*

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

My dear friends, on this last Sunday before Lent we meditate on our Faith and our outlook on life. Running through the readings today is the view that open-mindedness should be the characteristics of all the people of God. It emphasizes faith and the inclusiveness of God and the need to get rid of our tunnel vision.

In the first reading from the first book of Kings, Solomon in his wisdom wished that all people of all nations would one day accept the universal salvation offered by God and so he prayed:

***"When a foreigner comes and prays towards this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the people of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel." (1 Kings 8:42-3)***

Verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 96 - which we read this morning - continue this idea of the inclusiveness of God when it asks us to sing to the Lord and bless his name, proclaim the good news of salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among all nations and his wonders among all peoples.

In the Epistle, Paul after declaring his credentials in the letter to the Galatians expresses astonishment over the attitude of some Christians in Galatia who were beginning to stray from the Gospel.

Some people were beginning to sow seeds of discord among the congregation. These self-appointed evangelists were now beginning to preach that to be saved you must be circumcised and the all-inclusiveness of God which Paul had preached was now not the case. These elements were trying to belittle Paul saying that he was not in the original twelve and so could not be right. They insisted that he had been a persecutor and had no authorities from the leaders of the church.

They had belittled Paul's doctrine of grace freely given to preach that grace and gift are based on circumcision and obedience to the law. In short they were beginning to discriminate between Jew and Gentiles; it was this attitude that had astonished Paul.

For Paul all are equal in the eyes of God.

The Gospel which we have just heard is a story of an extra ordinary faith and courage. By any standards, the centurion standing in the street of Capernaum is an outstanding personality. First and foremost, he is an individual both in character and faith. What makes him extra special is his attitude to his servant. There is nothing narrow or crippled about his outlook on life. Here is a man who is an outsider, a pagan, a detested foreigner who had no church to go to yet the depth and quality of his faith contrasts with the lip service of the Jews.

He has a calm assurance of the one who has placed his problems in the hands of Jesus and is willing to take Jesus at his word and trust him. Jesus' attitude to him however shows us that God does not discriminate. He did not have to be a Jew to ask for a favour from God. Nor did he have to belong to a particular class. God's vision for humankind is not a tunnel vision but an open one.

He treats all as equals in almost all the gifts he gives especially in the most sublime gifts of salvation in Christ.

We as his children are expected to welcome all people irrespective of who they are.

There was no outsider with Jesus. He loved people across every barrier.

As a Jew, he loved the Romans. As a Jew, he loved the Samaritans. He gathered for his disciples those who not only unlike him but unlike each other.

Simon the zealot, Matthew the tax collector, Peter could blow hot and cold, Thomas had a sceptical approach to things supernatural.

These individuals were so different from each other that they had every reason to hate each other; yet, Jesus took them as a group and established an understanding among them.

To accept and welcome all does not mean that we pretend that there are no walls between people. While recognising a wall, we must look for the door. One example of this wall could be religion. I am not going to say more about that now but whenever I have the opportunity to say something on ecumenism that will be the time.

Besides religion, there are other walls which make it difficult to extend our love to other people. One other one is people's culture. People are culturally different; however, cultural walls will crumble if people of a particular culture have a basic respect for others. There are still other walls such as skin colour, race, where you live etc. Yes; most of the times, it is our sense of insecurity that makes us to put up more walls. Why must everybody be like you? Why do pianos and all musical instruments have different keys to make good music? Why do we admire different flowers in a flower garden? These are some of the questions we have to ask when we start thinking that everyone must be, like us. There is joy in diversity.

Whatever the wall, which blocks our loving acceptance of other people, It finally comes down to prejudice born of ignorance. We hate some people because we do not know them and we will not know them because we hate them. Love that places condition is not love. Christ did not place any conditions and we too as his followers should do likewise. Let us reflect on these.

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit: **Amen.**