

14 Sunday C

July 4, 2010

Cathedral

5:00 and Noon

Theme: As Lady Liberty (the Statue of Liberty) offers hospitality, so also the feminine image of this Sunday's Scriptures.

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

The Scriptures—that is, God's living Word to us—give us many images of God. These images are attempts which might allow the indescribable mystery of God to come deep within our souls. For example, we have the prayer which Jesus taught us, the "Our Father." The human father is one image of who this ineffable God is, so beyond us and yet very close to us.

This Sunday we hear of another image of God, given in the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah. It's a lovely image of God, who is portrayed as a mother consoling her children at her breasts and dandling them on her lap. Listen, then, to *this* image of God—

"For thus says the Lord:

**As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms and fondled in her lap;
as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you...**

When you see this, your heart shall rejoice..."

Within the parish there's a grandmother who treasures those times when she holds her grandbaby in her arms: it's a bond which goes to the depths of her being. She cuddles the child in her arms, and there's a tender safety and love beyond words. And I've invited the grandmother, as she caressingly holds her grandchild in her arms, to imagine that is how our God receives her—and holds us.

So this is the image for the chosen people, exiled for decades and now they've returned home to Jerusalem. **“For thus says the Lord: as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”** Their beloved Temple has been rebuilt, and in that joy they are given this image of God as a welcoming mother. It's the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah, and the image is given so that the chosen people might welcome with true hospitality *all* peoples—and not simply those of the chosen race.

Exactly ten years ago the work began on the renovation of our Cathedral. On that first day of construction, I also came here to be with you as your pastor. The Cathedral is rightly called the “Mother Church,” and so this image from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah is perfect for us. The Cathedral, as “Mother Church, is to mirror how our God is to all of us, cuddling her children in her arms and nursing them at her breasts.

You know, I looked back to my first homily here ten years ago. I offered then my vision of the Cathedral Parish. I spoke about opening wide the doors of the Cathedral and truly showing the welcome of the Mother Church. I spoke of those who had deep roots here and those who are new to the parish: both groups are to be welcomed with a mother's embrace. Then, too, I spoke of those of varied ethnicity, that we might show our universal faith. And then, well—listen to my quote from my first homily: “While ever teaching the dignity and permanence of marriage, let's truly open wide the doors to those who are divorced and remarried. And let's take away the barriers to those gays and lesbians who...ache to find a true home as well in the Catholic Church.”

Yes, a “mother” church—that's what the cathedral is called to be, mirroring our welcoming God.

I'm very pleased that we give such attention to hospitality and welcome here. We have so much for which to give thanks. Sisters and brothers: in our long 4th of July weekend, let's first make sure that each of us has truly *experienced* our God as the Book of Isaiah proclaims it. Has each of us allowed our God to comfort us like a small child, dandling us on God's lap? Have we asked God to do so? Only when we've experienced the mystery of God in such love...only *then* will we show that same welcome and hospitality to others.