

# *Gathering Nations of Every Language*

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The people of Israel have been scolded by the prophets for taking for granted their being chosen or excluding others from the free gifts of God. The first reading reminds us that God is a universal God over all nations and languages. Prophet Isaiah reminds the people of Israel that other nations are their brothers and sisters on equal footing before the Lord. Their very being will be considered “as an offering to the Lord.” There are several Christian hymns that invite us to come before the Lord, “Come as you are” or “Just as I am, I come broken.” We are those who came before the Lord, the people Prophet Isaiah referred, “the distant coastlands that never heard of my fame or seen my glory.” The responsorial for Psalm 117 today is “Go out to all the world and tell the Good News (Mk. 16:15).

Preaching the Good News is not without challenges and resistance. Observing such challenges someone poses a question to Jesus, “Lord, will only few people be saved?” The example of the “Narrow Gate” Jesus brought as an example helps us to understand the challenges and the discipline needed to be a true follower of him. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us, “Endure your trials as ‘discipline.’” St. Paul uses the analogy of training for sports, indicating the rigor and endurance required to be a disciplined competitor. Our faith is a gift and privilege, yet we cannot take it for granted. It requires of us to have the discipline of living and practicing our faith. We cannot be saved by membership association or cultural affiliation.

Historically, Catholics of European descent in the US by and large practiced their faith as exclusive club, preventing people of African Descent and Native Americans from participating in the sacraments of the church as equals. The legacy of such exclusion is still operative in our institutions, the low number of African American Catholics and the lack of adequate vocation to priesthood and religious life that could serve the population. Both the first reading and the Gospel tell us that God does not show favoritism, rather “people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.” We all have part in excluding others from the table of the Lord by passing our own judgment and biases on people by othering them because they do not conform to our human and cultural values.

Recently, the Office of Black Catholic and Ethnic Ministries hosted to big conferences: The National Association of African Catholics – Midwest Conference and Karen American Catholic Community – Youth Retreat. Over 500 people total have attended both events. These events were the true “gathering of nations and every language.” These were what the Gospel refers coming from the four directions of the world or Prophet Isaiah calls, “they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.” To correct past shortcomings, there are efforts to be inclusive in hiring practices, and appreciating diversity as an asset. The resistance we still notice are contrary to the prophetic calls and Gospel values we are expective to live by and practice.