

On Sunday, June 2, I released "*The Many Faces of our Church: A Letter to our Catholic Faithful Regarding our Cultural Diversity*" to representatives of each parish during an afternoon prayer service in our Cathedral.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that God's blessings are manifested in many ways. That is evident in Northwest Indiana in the cultural diversity which we experience. We do not always fully appreciate this. As a result, we sometimes undermine opportunities to enhance the quality of our life. By failing to see cultural diversity as a rich resource from which we can draw, we prevent ourselves from realizing the potential that can be ours.

Every part of our body is a truly valuable, unique, highly sophisticated mechanism which can perform a function which no other part of our body can. Yet, when we think of ourselves, we never think of any one part but rather the sum of the parts that compose our body. It is what the parts are and can accomplish in unison that makes the human body such a beautifully designed organism.

In the same way, although each unique culture is a gift from God, when we think of the human race, we cannot help but include every culture that exists in our world. Moreover, it is only in the peaceful interrelationship of those cultures that our common good can properly be achieved and the true potential of each person can be fully realized.

We might very honestly say that the beauty and complexity of God is mirrored in the cultural diversity which exists in our world and community. Anything we do to facilitate the genuine cooperation among the cultures of our Church and community more clearly brings into focus a reflection of God's image in our midst.

Throughout the remainder of 2002 and through Pentecost Sunday 2003, I am asking our Catholic faithful to focus not only on the *gift of culture* but the *gift of cultural diversity*. I am asking you to read this Pastoral Letter carefully and to prayerfully consider and discuss its contents with others.

In 2003, I will issue another Pastoral Letter regarding the sin of racism, which clearly is the greatest threat in our own day to cooperation among cultures and races, and which prevents the image of God from being clearly visible in our communal life.

We undertake the discussion of these topics because, as Church, we are called upon to be both the "sign" and "instrument" of God's kingdom in this world. This means that the face of God should be visible in the life of our Church and our community. Where it is not yet fully visible, we should be an instrument of making God's plan a reality.

I ask you to join with me in a journey which I pray, with God's blessing, will help us open our hearts to a better appreciation and understanding of the cultures and races which are a part of our Church and our community. I ask you to develop plans of action which will effect a closer cooperation among all of our people.

These are, indeed, difficult challenges, but nonetheless necessary for us who call ourselves "disciples." I have every confidence that our Catholic faithful will rise to these challenges.

Northwest Indiana

Our American culture has been fashioned over the years by many separate cultures which have been brought here from many countries of the world. The story of Northwest Indiana is no exception. This area was explored and charted by pioneers like LaSalle and Father Marquette in the 1700s, and was occupied by the Pottawatomi Indians who were native to this region.

In the mid to latter part of the 1800s, immigrants from Europe came here in search of land for farming, and in the early 1900s, many came in answer to the call for employment in the area's steel mills, refineries, and many factories.

Later, African Americans from the southern states, Latinos from Mexico and Puerto Rico, immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, Central and South America arrived in order to obtain the same quality of life that so many before them had already achieved.

Shared Goals

The goals of each ethnic and racial group were clear, namely, to practice the religion of their choice, to live in a free society, and to obtain a better quality of life for themselves and their children. Although they shared the same goals, each ethnic/racial group believed it was possible to realize these goals without having to sacrifice the advantages of their own distinctive culture.

The Melting Pot

Each ethnic and racial group was soon to discover that the dominant culture in America did not accept them as they had hoped. The model which many offered, and which is often referred to when speaking of socialization into American culture, is the "Melting Pot." This symbol calls to mind the image of people from many cultures being placed into a large pot, mixed together, and then poured out into the mold of the model American citizen.

The function of this metaphor was to encourage the newly arrived people to shed the culture that had hitherto identified them and to learn everything which was deemed to be "truly American." Of course it was the people of wealth and power, serving as the gatekeepers of America, who held up this image and defined what that meant. They were the people who had already "arrived" and who had "roots." They saw themselves as the molders of American culture. They felt threatened by the immigrants whose cultures were so different from their own. Their response was to reshape those cultures which often resulted in suppression of them.

Some of that molding began immediately upon arrival at places like Ellis Island, where a person's name might be changed to the city of their birth or might become anglicized simply because the gatekeeper could not pronounce the immigrant's real name. There was no immigrant group, even in the present-day, that was spared the ordeal of having to undergo this initiation, even though places like Ellis Island have long since ceased to exist.

Unfortunately, even those groups who suffered through this process upon their arrival in America took part in subjecting the next immigrant arrivals to a similar kind of treatment. As each group adopted the metaphor of the melting pot as their own, they began to view the immigrants who arrived after them as in need of the same process of acculturation.

In a different, but nonetheless destructive manner, involuntary immigrants who came to America as slaves, chief among whom are African Americans, were stripped of their culture and forced to adopt one entirely foreign. The same can be said for Native Americans who were not only forced to forfeit their culture, but also the land upon which that culture developed.

It is no wonder that many immigrants often settled in neighborhoods with members of the same ethnic/racial group and founded "national" parishes, which could nourish their faith within the context of their native language and through customs and traditions very dear to them. This was simply their way to survive.

Second-generation ethnic Americans observed the methods of the dominant culture and adapted. Many felt the need to remove themselves

from the trappings of their ethnic/racial culture so that they would be accepted as Americans. Some Americanized their names, and most second-generation ethnics would not speak in any language but English so as to show that they fit well into the mold.

Although a metaphor which clearly influenced much of America's thinking about immigrants, the "Melting Pot" has had a negative impact upon immigrant groups and, indeed, our whole American culture. It seeks to change rather than acknowledge and affirm the many good qualities which each culture brings to this country, and it fails to embrace the concept of diversity.

The Mosaic

More recently, another sociological model has been offered to help us understand how we might view socialization in the United States. That model is called the "Mosaic." Just as a mosaic is made up of many differently shaped colored pieces whose placement together composes a picture that would not look as beautiful or unique were the pieces all the same shape and color, so the many ethnic/racial groups can be viewed as being good in and of themselves. It is precisely the existence and mix of these groups which renders the richness of detail that gives shape to the portrait of America in general, and Northwest Indiana in particular.

This model does not seek to change the culture which identifies the person, but rather it welcomes and includes it as part of the mix of cultures. Faithfulness to the U.S. Constitution is the only area in which there must be universal agreement and to which there must be universal allegiance.

Melting Pot vs. Mosaic

Each model defines a specific way we look at what and who is American. The Melting Pot model would have everyone seek to change who they were, to forget what had sustained them, and to internalize attitudes and adopt customs and traditions that are considered "American" by another group's standards.

The mosaic model recognizes the goodness and value of each cultural/racial tradition. This model is much more consistent with our Catholic teaching, also shared by people of other faiths, that God created man and woman in His image and likeness, and although each of us is unique we are of equal value in God's eyes. This becomes the preferred model for viewing how diverse cultures can and should relate to one another. The sole critique of the elements of each culture is faithfulness to the plan of our God.

Culture is a Two-Edged Sword

Culture is, indeed, a two-edged sword. It teaches and reaffirms values, describes the roles one can assume in life, informs us of cultural expectations, and designates how individuals and institutions relate to one another. It integrates the disciplines of theology, psychology, sociology, education, economics and political science. It defines the group to which one belongs and gives identity to those who participate.

On the other hand, in so doing, it excludes those who are not members of the group. In the process of helping one find oneself and one's place in the world in the traditions and customs, etc. of one's group, it creates a fence between given groups by defining one as different, and even better, than the other. *So the very culture which serves the good of the individual can also be the cause of conflict between groups of people.*

The Mystification of Culture

A tremendous obstacle to the cooperation of individuals and groups of different cultures/races comes from what can be described as the "mystification" of culture. By mystification I am referring to that state of mind which is created when the traditions, customs, rituals and patterns of thinking that are unique to a given culture render that culture confusing, mysterious and alien to someone outside of it.

The outsider feels "mystified" by it all. Thus, just as fear is usually not far from the door of ignorance, so that which is alien can cause feelings of insecurity and easily be viewed as a threat.

We have only to look at how earlier people whom we would characterize as "primitive" and "provincial" used terminology. Often the term for "stranger" or "foreigner" also included the concepts of "barbarian" and "enemy."

Reactions to Mystification

The discipline of psychology informs us that human nature often fears what it does not understand, and that the reaction to that fear is one of flight, attack, or a combination of both. Examples of flight are seen in the physical movement of populations away from cultures they deem mystifying, or as in the case of an individual who segregates oneself socially from others due to a difference in culture.

Examples of attack can take on the form of words or deeds. When one seeks to verbally demean a group because of cultural differences, or engages in developing policies or procedures which would exclude

members of a group from opportunities that should be open to all, or engages in acts of violence, one is guilty of attacking.

Demystification of Culture

It is only through the demystification of culture that groups will come to understand one another. That ignorance will give way to knowledge and fear will give way to trust. That process starts when members of one culture invite members of another into their world. Suddenly that which was once alien now becomes familiar and that which was mysterious and confusing is capable of being understood.

Such a process enables the other to begin to see the world from another person's perspective and to feel more comfortable in that world. *It is by participation in the world of another culture that the process of demystification takes place.*

Telling the Story

During this fall, I am asking the Catholic faithful of our diocese to come together and to tell the stories of their own cultural heritage and that of their respective parishes in a way that is faithful to the truth. In this process, we will find many examples of contributions which were made by each culture to both the religious and civic communities in Northwest Indiana. It is important to acknowledge the great strengths which each group brings to the whole and to affirm each ethnic/racial grouping as contributing to the richness of our Church and broader community.

However, if we are, indeed, faithful to the truth, we will also have to tell the stories that are much more difficult to put into words. These are the stories which admit to weakness in character, jealousy, insecurity, anger, and unjustified conflict and exclusion. These are the stories which, in some cases, point to examples of how people may have been denied access to what was rightfully theirs solely on the basis of ethnicity or race.

It is important to tell these stories as well because it is only when we have acknowledged our weaknesses and sins that we can open our hearts to conversion, repentance, and the firm desire to make amends for wrongdoing. It is the sign of a healthy person, family and Church that seeks to tell its story with unwavering faithfulness to the truth.

Some parishes are not identified specifically by a dominant ethnicity or race. With each successive generation the ties to ethnicity diminish and, because of intermarriage between groups, many do not identify themselves by a specific ethnic/racial culture. Nevertheless, each parish has its own

distinctive composition of groups. This composition constitutes a culture in itself, albeit not necessarily one of a specific ethnicity or race.

Some of our parishes have grown because of an influx of population from other areas of our diocese. These faithful have brought with them an experience of Church which has been influenced in many cases by other ethnic parishes. Some of our faithful have moved from Illinois and brought with them their experience of Church there. Some have moved from neighborhoods that were changing in ethnicity or race. Some have moved because of increased crime.

Each brings a mindset that influences the parish which they join. These parishes, some of which have been in existence for a long time, are a mix of people who have roots in the area as well as people who have recently arrived. There is no single ethnicity which binds them together nor sense of neighborhood or community. What they have in common is their Catholic faith.

The stories of these parishes will be much different than the stories of others. Nonetheless, they are stories of people seeking to understand the meaning of American culture and of relating to one another in Christian love.

The Role of the Church

Let there be no mistake as to what I am asking the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Gary to undertake. We are beginning a process of dialogue within our parishes which — if approached with an open mind and heart — will lead to enhanced understanding, deeper respect, and greater love. Later we will invite members of other denominations and religions who may be interested in joining us in that dialogue.

We begin with a discussion of cultural diversity, but that is not the final goal of our efforts. As throughout the United States, so too in Northwest Indiana, we have all been influenced by the effects of racism. *It is a part of our culture. It is a part of our conditioning. It is something in which we all participate to a greater or lesser degree. It is something which is destructive of the quality of human life not only for those who suffer the effects of racism but for those who perpetrate it.* Racism is something we need to better understand and more closely examine in a rational and measured way so that we might, in the process of searching our hearts, become aware of our own individual participation in it.

Today we take the first step as the Catholic Church in Northwest Indiana in addressing the issue of racism. We do so publicly so that all of our brothers and sisters will know the seriousness of our intent to deal with

this most pernicious of sins. We open our minds and hearts to all denominations and religions who seek to collaborate in promoting greater unity and charity, and we pledge our cooperation to work with them to achieve that end.

During the remainder of 2002 and through Pentecost Sunday 2003, I am asking the Catholic faithful to do the following:

- 1) That each parish, under the leadership of its Parish Pastoral Council, make this work a priority of its parish for the next three years.**
- 2) That each parish facilitate a process for telling its story of cultural development in a manner which is faithful to the truth.**
- 3) That all of our faithful participate in a faith-sharing group this fall, which will be focused on the cultural mix and dynamics of your parish and Northwest Indiana, and which will involve you in the process of formulating the story of your parish.**
- 4) That each parish celebrates an event in January or February of 2003 which both acknowledges and affirms the ethnic/racial mixture of the parish. This should flow from the discussions in the various faith-sharing groups.**
- 5) That parishes which currently hold annual cultural celebrations make efforts to invite people outside the parish and their respective dominant cultures to participate in the celebration.**
- 6) That all of our parishes find innovative ways to create opportunities, e.g., liturgical, educational and social, to invite participation by those outside the parish. I am referring not only to inviting our Catholic faithful who are members of other parishes but our non-Catholic brothers and sisters as well.**
- 7) That parishes take advantage of a faith-sharing program to be offered during Lent 2003 which will enable them to come together with members of other parishes in the diocese and which will include, whenever possible, members of non-Catholic congregations and believers of other faiths.**
- 8) That each parish include a petition in the general intercessions during September and October praying for openness to the Holy Spirit on the part of all Catholics, and that all of our faithful include this intention in their daily prayers that week.**
- 9) That all of our faithful abstain from meat on all Fridays during September and October, and that all Catholics, ages 18 to 62, observe a day of Fasting**

on Wednesday, October 2, 2002, the Feast of the Holy Angels, the patron feast of our diocese. Fasting and abstaining from meat is a traditional Catholic way of calling attention to a great need. In this case, the need is for an openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in developing a deeper appreciation of God's gift of the cultural diversity in Northwest Indiana.

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I hope you will join your fellow parishioners, other members of our diocese, the community at large, and me in this process. It will be an enlightening time as we examine our cultural roots, tell our stories, and grow as a community of faith. It will also be an occasion to celebrate our roots, stories, and growth.

Inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit, let us open our hearts and minds to the journey of faith we are about to begin!