

“Let the Peoples Praise You, God; May All the Peoples Praise You” (Psalm 67)

[Johann Sebastian Bach Italian Concerto, I: Allegro]

Johann Sebastian Bach published two works in the second volume of his Clavier-Übung in 1735, the Concerto nach Italienischem Gusto and the Ouvertüre nach Französischer Art. Both pieces have German titles because Bach was German, but they concern Italian and French musical styles. The piece I just played for you is the first movement of the Italian Concerto. However, it isn't really a concerto and it isn't really Italian. A concerto usually features one instrument in dialogue with an orchestra - unless it's a concerto grosso, which features multiple soloists. Bach wrote this piece for a two-manual harpsichord in order to contrast certain sections, thus imitating the effect of a concerto even though it is unabashedly a work for keyboard solo. The only thing Italian about it is that it is a three-movement work, the middle movement slower than the other two. The Italians weren't the only ones doing that, but that construction became known as the Italian style. Bach even put the Italian word Gusto into the German title, perhaps as an additional elaboration. This morning you heard an American priest acting like a musician, playing on piano a piece written for harpsichord solo, inspired by compositions designed for orchestra, and written by a German composer imitating an Italian style. There is nothing new about multiculturalism.

I've been asked to share with you the urgency in finding ways to do what we've been talking about - embracing diversity within the one Faith, celebrating the rich diversity that gives us so many ways to praise God. I will make three points, illustrating each of them with a passage from the gospels, and then I'll conclude with some remarks about Psalm 67, which supplies the title of this talk: “Let the Peoples Praise You, God; May All the Peoples Praise You.” My three points are these: Stretch yourself, Love one another, and Be patient.

Number one. Stretch yourself. Luke's gospel tells this story of Jesus calling Simon. Simon had been up all night trying to fish. He and his friends had caught nothing. They had given up. They rowed back to the shore where they cleaned their nets, tired and disappointed by the day's work. There, a crowd had gathered to listen to a man named Jesus. He noticed the fishers and approached them. He walked right onto Simon's boat. Simon looked up, wondering, “Now, what?” Jesus said to him, “Put out a short distance from the shore.” The fisher had become the chauffeur. Interrupted from his work, anxious to go home, Simon nevertheless obliged. He steered the boat a short way into the water. Technologically astute, Jesus bounced his baritone over the waters, around the cove, and into the ears of his listeners. Simon, keeping the boat at bay, was impressed with the voice, the medium and the message. In his moment of charity, escorting the preacher to his watery podium, Simon felt moved. Jesus concluded

his discourse. Simon prepared to bring the boat back to the shore. But then the rabbi turned directly to him. "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon hesitated. He was not afraid of deep water. He lived on deep water. It wasn't fear that froze him; it was disillusionment; it was exhaustion. "We've already tried that," he said. "We have worked all night and have caught nothing." But in spite of his frustration, obsessed with fishing, Simon took the bait. "At your command I will lower the nets." He caught so many fish that the nets he had just mended nearly tore open again. Simon's friends came to the rescue, but the quantity of fish nearly sank both boats. Trembling, Simon fell down to the knees of Jesus and said an anti-prayer - not the great prayer that concludes the Book of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus." No, Simon said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Jesus saw something else on Simon's face: He saw fear. "Do not be afraid," he said. "Do not be afraid."

When I became pastor of St. Anthony Catholic Church in Kansas City Missouri four years ago, I knew enough Spanish to get started, but not enough to do all that the community needed. Like Simon, I had put out into deep water, found it full of work, and discovered that I could not catch the fish alone. I needed new skills, and I needed help. I also discovered a small but sturdy Vietnamese population. Years ago, they had put out into deeper waters than I had, refugees unfairly deprived of their homeland. Some of our Vietnamese speak English, but many do not. None of them speaks Spanish. One of the oldest anglo members of our community challenged me, "When is a priest here going to reach out to the Vietnamese?" I was having a hard enough time managing Spanish. But after a year and a half, when I felt that my Spanish had improved, I downloaded an app to have my first look at the Vietnamese language. I recognized most of the alphabet except for the accent marks. I discovered that the grammar was easier than English and Spanish. I saw that the vocabulary did not resemble any other language I had studied. The Vietnamese also have an impenetrable system of saying the simple words "I" and "you," depending on the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Adding all that up, I estimated that it would take me sixty years to learn Vietnamese. But I was tired of not knowing the most basic expressions to communicate with some of the faithful members of our parish. I thought about missionary priests from Europe who came to the Americas in order to teach the faith. When they arrived, there was no grammar book of native languages to get them started. They committed themselves to learn the language of the people. My ability to speak Vietnamese is still awful, but our members encourage me to try. I consider this effort part of my responsibility as a pastor.

When I was in school, language study seemed about as hard as advanced calculus. You could make some progress with it, but beginners rarely got any satisfaction. Many Americans are not motivated to learn another language because we can get by without it. Immigrants to the United States for the most part shoulder the challenge of learning English; however, there are some who do not. If you don't know the rules of spelling and grammar in your own language, you will struggle to learn them in another. In Vietnamese, words have only one syllable. Many of them share the same spelling except for the accent. If you use

the wrong accent, you have the wrong word. One Vietnamese priest told me that when American priests celebrate mass in his language, we often mispronounce “Lift up your hearts” so badly that it sounds like “Lift up your lobsters.” Language is the strongest headwind in the search for peaceful waters on the ocean of multiculturalism.

There are other issues. Cultures approach faith and music differently - not necessarily better, but differently. Our hispanic community likes livelier music than the anglo community does. Anglos like to start the liturgy on time and end it within an hour; someone will complain if we don't. The Vietnamese have opinions about how to dress and how to carry objects in procession. The hispanic integration of liturgy, popular piety, and spiritual movements is admirable. Anglos are endlessly fascinated by rubrics and liturgical law. The hispanic community frequents the sacrament of penance. In fact the same people who show up late for mass in Spanish show up early for confession. The question I hear the most from hispanic visitors to St. Anthony's is “When are confessions?” The question I hear most from anglo visitors is “Where is the bathroom?” With the revised Order of Celebrating Matrimony, many anglos are wondering how could we ever get people to sing at a wedding mass, much less to sing a Gloria. In the hispanic community singing is expected and most everyone knows several settings of the Gloria. The anglo community does not change the translation of the words of acclamations and litanies such as the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei when these are set to music, but the hispanic community does. It was hard for me at first to learn the words of the Lord's Prayer in Spanish because we sang several different versions of it on Sundays. I still find it gutsy when composers think that they can improve the words that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. When it comes to finances, many people in the anglo community live in a world of parish registration, envelopes and pledges; many people in the hispanic community couple cash in the collection with work and ministry around the parish.

To step into another culture is to put your own culture in relief. You may realize you can do without some things you thought were essential. You may adopt new ideas. One of the greatest gifts you can give society and yourself is curiosity. Stretch yourself. Be willing to fail. Reach out. When Simon realized how much would be expected of him, Jesus saw fear on his face. “Don't be afraid,” Jesus said. Usually Christ is not asking us to do something completely unfamiliar. All he told this fisher to do was to stretch, to do something he did every day and every night. We communicate, listen and dialogue every day. We have these skills. Maybe you think about languages and cultures the way Simon felt after a long night of unsuccessful fishing: discouraged, disillusioned and tired. When Jesus said, “Put out into deep water,” Simon said, “We've tried that. It doesn't work.” When Christ says to you, “Put out into the deep water of your neighbors,” how will you respond?

Number two: Love one another. In John's gospel, Jesus spent his final night with his closest disciples, washing their feet and teaching. They already knew that Jesus stressed the importance of love. In Mark's gospel, a scribe had asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied with a

passage from Deuteronomy, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” However, Jesus was not satisfied with that question. To him, the greatest commandment was not sufficient. So he answered a question the scribe never asked: “The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” That comes from Leviticus. Jesus was the first to reach into these two different parts of the Torah, select these commands, join them, and place them in this order. At the center of the law was love. The disciples had learned that.

They also knew that Jesus had said something else profound about love. They were to love not only their neighbor, but also their enemies. Like everyone else they instinctively loved the people who loved them and hated the people who hated them. Jesus said no. Love is for everyone. Love is not something that only some people receive; it is something that all disciples give. Love categorizes the quality of a disciple, not the quality of the people a disciple meets.

At the Last Supper, though, Jesus said something further about love. He said, “Love one another.” At first this doesn’t seem different from “Love your neighbor,” but it is. In Luke’s gospel, the scribe presses the point further. “And who is my neighbor?” Because of that question we have one of Jesus’ most glorious parables, the Good Samaritan. Your neighbor, according to Jesus, is a stranger in need. You have to love that neighbor. At the Last Supper there were no strangers. No one was merely a neighbor. They were disciples - members of the same community. Yet when Jesus looked at them, he saw those who argued about who was the greatest; he saw James and John, who wanted to sit at his right and left ahead of the others, the same two who had asked if they should call down fire from heaven to punish inhospitable Samaritans; he saw Peter, who would deny him; and the empty chair of Judas. Jesus said to each member of this supposedly tight-knit group, “Love one another. Would you please get along?” The Christian message would fail if the disciples failed to love.

In a multicultural context, these words still ring. Jesus is saying to each one of us, “Love one another. Would you please get along?” Love will lower the barriers to dialogue. In fact, it already does in some families. Individuals from one ethnicity fall in love with an individual from another. One of the ways that resistance to different cultures breaks down is through the intimacies of love. When you are in love with someone, you overlook differences or you become charmed by them. Our first step in dealing with other people should always be love. Some of us use a different first step: We may approach a stranger with suspicion, out of self-interest, or because of lust. None of it works. Love rules.

God has designed two ways that lure us into love like fish into a net. One way works for individuals and the other works for groups. Beauty attracts us to individuals, but with groups what attracts us is food. At our parish we have anglos who patronize the taco dinner and hispanics who help with the St. Joseph Table. The Vietnamese, the Haitians and the South Sudanese are all invited to provide food and entertainment in the parish festival. People love good food, no matter where it comes from. Perhaps God is doing something special in our

parishes by drawing different people together around what will make us fall in love - the food and drink of the eucharist.

In organizing the prayers of the mass, the post-Vatican II Roman Missal made its own attempt at multiculturalism. The committee that prepared it in the 1960s borrowed some prayers from the Ambrosian and Mozarabic Rites, for example. These prayers developed outside the Roman tradition, but they were introduced into the Roman Missal. For example, the collect for the Fifth Sunday of Lent comes from the Mozarabic Rite, the one for the Fifth Sunday of Easter comes from the Ambrosian tradition, and the collect from the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time is a traditional Roman prayer from the Gregorian Sacramentary's Hadrian supplement. You can't tell by listening to them, but they each come from a unique cultural source that blended into the missal as an expression of love.

Since becoming pastor of St. Anthony's, I've become more aware of how many diocesan communications come out only in English. We are asked to publish announcements in our bulletins or pin posters to the walls of our churches, but often these requests come to us in one language. Our marriage tribunal, God bless them, has made its forms available in Spanish. It has also worked patiently with me through Vietnamese cases, especially difficult because our tribunal staff has no one who can read that language. I've become annoyed whenever diocesan-wide liturgical celebrations such as the chrism mass and ordinations are conducted completely in English, except when the choir sings something in Latin. Sometimes when we sing a Kyrie, we have three more Greek words than Spanish words.

Everyone is overworked. But I suspect what we lack is love. Not merely professional love, but sincere love - the kind that comes from meeting people, getting to know them, hearing their stories, and letting their lives have an impact on yours. Once that happens, you start thinking about communication in a different light. At the diocesan level, this requires more than setting up an office of hispanic ministry. For some dioceses, that is merely an office of translation ministry. The principle diocesan offices all need people who are bilingual. Or trilingual. And not just people who know the language, but people who love, truly love the members of ethnic communities. Jesus said, "Love God," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Love your enemies," but he also said something more pointed to his followers who weren't doing it very well: "Love one another."

Number three, be patient. The description I received for this talk asked me to convey the urgency for finding ways to put what we've learned into practice. I understand that the need is urgent, and that we can do some things right away, like stretching ourselves and loving one another. Those efforts will make a difference. However, for my third point I'd rather preach patience than urgency. We have to be deliberate in making multicultural progress. We also have to be patient with the results. They will come, but they will take time. We cannot spend that time in idleness, but in activity.

Just before the passion story gets underway in John's gospel, Jesus has a multicultural moment. He has just made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. John

says that the crowds turned out because they heard about the raising of Lazarus, which John reports in the previous chapter. The Pharisees admit their loss. They say to one another, "You can see that you are gaining nothing. Look," they say admiring the rockstar-proportion crowd that has jammed the streets of Jerusalem, "the whole world has gone after him." As if on cue, enter the Greeks. Like the Romans, the Greeks worshiped a variety of gods. They had established beautiful temples fashioned by their greatest architects and sculptors. Even their history intertwined with their mythology. We do some of this too. Certain individuals and events become mythologically true even if they do not match historical facts, like the invention of baseball by Abner Doubleday. But the Greeks had a more complex system of belief on the line, parallel to the pagan cults of ancient Rome. In the moments after the Palm Sunday procession, a group of these Greeks approaches Philip with a request. They say to him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." The pulpit of St. John Lutheran Church in Seward, Nebraska, has this verse of scripture carved on the top in full view of the preacher, not of the congregation. Before the preacher starts, these insistent words stare back, as if from the congregation: "Sir, we would see Jesus."

Why the Greeks went to Philip is a mystery. He was from Bethsaida, but there is no evidence that it was more Greek-friendly than other towns. It clearly flummoxed Philip. Instead of going immediately to Jesus, he went to Andrew for advice. Then both of them went to Jesus and reported the request. At the end of Jesus' ministry, a ministry intended primarily and by some accounts exclusively to the Jews, some Greeks take notice. Jesus has had to be patient. Mercifully he gets a glimpse of what lies ahead in this multicultural moment when his slow, deliberate, patient ministry reaches a climax.

We never hear what Jesus did. Did he meet the Greeks? Did he turn them away? Sometimes when someone asks Jesus a question he answers in an oblique way, as we saw in the question, "What is the greatest commandment?" When the rich man ran up to Jesus to ask him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." It had nothing to do with the question. For the Greeks, this was a moment like that. Philip and Andrew tell Jesus that the Greeks want to see him, and what does Jesus say? Not yes or no or how about 2:30? No, he says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." And then, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat." Surely not one of the answers that Philip and Andrew thought they would get. But all is not lost. The Greeks are interested in the gospel. Patience has born fruit.

At daily mass at St. Anthony's I may have about 20 people present, split almost evenly among English, Spanish and Vietnamese speakers. We used to have the weekday mass totally in English. We offer Spanish-language masses on Sundays. I felt uncomfortable with this, and at the questioning of our conscientious permanent deacon, we made a few changes. I learned how to say a few lines of the mass in Vietnamese. We agreed to have native speakers proclaim the first reading in Spanish on Tuesdays and in Vietnamese on Fridays. I switch languages throughout the week for the presidential prayers. We sing the Sanctus

and Agnus Dei in Latin chant every day because the older Vietnamese members remember it. After a while I got a request from anglo descendants of the Italian immigrants who founded our parish. Our custom has been that once a year, on the Feast of St. Joseph, just before blessing the St. Joseph Table, the pastor celebrates mass in Italian. I guess our founders thought that St. Joseph came from Italy. Descendants of our founding immigrant families were asking if they could hear a little Italian once in a while at the weekday mass. So now they do. One day recently as I started giving communion, the elderly Vietnamese gentleman who presents himself first in the communion line stood before me, and I drew a blank on the Vietnamese expression, "The body of Christ." I couldn't remember the words and just stared at him with my mouth open. He prompted me. That cleared my head - or so I thought. The next communicant was anglo. I said, "The body of Christ" in Vietnamese. The next was hispanic. I said, "The body of Christ" in Italian. Sometimes when things go wrong, they get completely unhinged. I have to be patient with myself, and not just in the communion line.

At times it doesn't go well. In any parish you will have disagreements over matters such as appropriate music at mass, the wardrobe of liturgical ministers, and the ownership of the coffeepots in the parish hall. Those disagreements get sharper when people have trouble communicating among themselves. Prejudices form when you cannot talk - or do not talk - to people outside your group. We can all do better, but it will take time. Still, it will not happen if we just sit back and wait. We have to try - urgently.

Hispanic and Vietnamese youth are helping us. Many of them are bilingual. They understand different cultures, and they can translate the thoughts of societies and generations. Learning languages takes time, but we can start by learning to sing some of the songs of other cultures. Some of our composers today are taking this need to heart, writing music with words in multiple languages. Quite honestly, though, it isn't always successful. Composers mean well, but sometimes the words and thoughts of one language do not line up well with the same rhythms and notes in another language. Sometimes the translated lyrics feel like shoes that doesn't quite fit. Even better is to learn to sing the songs that belong to other cultures in their own tongue. It will take time. But singing with one another can help us start talking to one another.

Sometimes the choice of music requires everyone to be patient. Some celebrations feature collections of music from different cultures. This happens especially at cathedrals and in some parish Holy Week observances when multiple cultures gather as one. The music then reflects the styles and languages of the people present. This differs from the concept of liturgical music in the past. Catholics have been used to hearing one style at one mass, whether it be chant, hymnody or folk. Now it is common at major diocesan gatherings that all these musical styles share the same liturgy, along with music from other cultures and languages. The hope is that everyone will feel at home with something. I apply this theory to the decorations on the wall of my office. I like some of the religious art there, but not all of it. I hope that all the people who come to see me will find something on the wall that connects with them. The same can happen with music.

It would be wonderful if we all could appreciate all the different styles and languages of music at a cathedral liturgy, but we probably cannot. We will have our favorites. Still, the patience we exercise with other styles is itself a charity that builds up the body of Christ. Paragraph 95 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal makes this remark about the duties of the people of God: “In the celebration of Mass the faithful form a holy people, a people of God’s own possession and a royal Priesthood, so that they may give thanks to God and offer the unblemished sacrificial Victim not only by means of the hands of the Priest but also together with him and so that they may learn to offer their very selves. They should, moreover, take care to show this by their deep religious sense and their charity toward brothers and sisters who participate with them in the same celebration.” Charity will guide us forward on the road to better worship.

When the Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they approached him through an intermediary, and when he heard about their wish, he immediately reflected on his death and resurrection. When we worship with people of other cultures, part of us has to die, but we will rise again stronger than before. We will also be better prepared to evangelize nonbelievers who suspect in their heart the great belief that we have come to profess - the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If we have been patient, we will respond with charity when someone says to us, “Sir,” or “Madam, I would like to see Jesus.”

So there you have my three pieces of advice: Stretch yourself. Love one another. Be patient. The title of this talk coming from Psalm 67 reminds us of the context in which we do these things. Psalm 67 is a prayer of thanksgiving for a fruitful harvest and a prayer of petition for the next harvest. It sees the fruits of the earth as a sign of God’s blessing, not of human endeavor. It includes a refrain: “Let the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.” That refrain seems to offer God a motive for granting another good harvest. If we get food, we’ll give praise. Yet the psalm is not just personal. It is not asking for a good local harvest, but that all peoples may have food. All the ends of the earth will revere God for blessings received.

In the Liturgy of the Hours, this is one of the psalms we may use to start the day. Our first duty each day is to praise God together with all other peoples of the world. This is also one of the psalms we may use in the United States for the mass of Thanksgiving Day. It unites the voices of the people in praise of God at church before they go home to enjoy the bounty of the harvest.

My brothers and sisters, the gathering of people from different nations and cultures at a Catholic mass is a microcosm and foreshadowing of the gathering of the nations of the earth at the end of the ages. At the eucharist we experience the fullness of the church present in one place and one time. We may have disagreements with others who are there. We may be disappointed with the homily and the music. We may have complaints about the air conditioning and the heat. But all these show us how weak we humans are and how much we rely on God. When we are with others, we see what role we are to play. If the nations are to praise God, all the nations, then we each must urgently do our part. We stretch ourselves to love our neighbor. We deliberately enter the tasks of charity,

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knowing that a good harvest takes patient, tender care. God will help us because God surely desires the praise of all the people. God will harvest the fruit of our voices where in one concerto grosso we will sing with all the saints and angels of heaven, “Let the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.”