

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I am grateful to Fr. Macario for celebrating mass here the last few weekends while I was on vacation. I traveled to France with my sister Mary, her husband and their two daughters. A friend of mine then met us over there. These two nieces are 10 and 14, and they study French in school. They got to have their first look at Paris, and then I went on to visit other areas to the south and north. Many of you have seen my photos on Facebook and Instagram. I saw the stained glass windows at Sainte Chapelle, the Mona Lisa, two complete rooms of water lilies painted by Claude Monet, the 11th century Bayeux tapestry that depicts the Battle of Hastings, and the tombs of American soldiers who lost their lives on D-Day at Omaha Beach. We also toured a prehistoric cave where artists painted animals on the interior rock 14,000 years ago. Of course, we also ate some wonderful food, drank some excellent wine, and agreed to ride a huge Ferris Wheel with the girls. France has an impressive patrimony on display. The people treasure their arts and their history.

Shortly after coming home from all of that beauty, friendship and wonder, I learned the news of the terrorist attack in Orlando, the worst mass killing in the history of the United States. Paris also suffered terrorist attacks last year; no place is immune from this possibility. The Violence Policy Center says that the number of people who die from firearms in the United States is now approaching the number who die in automobile accidents. Some commentators believe that the increased terrorist activity in the United States results from the accessibility of automatic weapons. The attack in Orlando, which targeted a gay bar on Latino night, shows how people with unreasonable hostilities can kill and permanently damage a community's sense of safety. There is some evidence that the killer, who called himself a follower of the Islamic terrorist group ISIS, was also a gay man, conflicted with his sexual identity, who targeted the very objects of his attraction. Whether or not that is true, no gay persons should ever feel that they have to hate themselves because of what they love. Nor should they lack compassion, safety or the reasonable opportunity to express affection.

All of us harbor some apprehensions toward people of different cultures, religions, ethnicities, sex and sexual preferences. In the Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul had to deal with some of these challenges among the first Christians. Many of them were Jews; others belonged to non-Jewish Greek religions, the Gentiles . As you can imagine, these new Christians did not immediately get along with one other. Paul proclaimed that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, and while he was making comparisons, he added that there is no slave or free, or male or female. All have a special relationship with God: they are all God's children. And all should therefore have a special relationship with one another because all are one in Christ Jesus.

In the wake of the Orlando tragedy, we could all evaluate how we let prejudice and violence into our lives. What television programs and movies do you choose to watch? What video games are played at your home? When you get angry, what actions do you perform? When thoughts of violence enter your mind, do you keep them there or dismiss them? Let's build a place where visitors can come in peace and return home with memories of how beautiful the world can be.