

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last month while I was in Washington DC for a meeting, a friend invited me to dinner with several of her friends at her home. That night I soon realized that the ten people seated around me at the table included Democrats, Republicans, and Green Party members - all with strong opinions. As you can imagine, just a few weeks before the election, the conversation kept getting livelier and louder. I kept quiet through most of it. At one point, someone asked me, "Do you have conversations like this in Kansas City?" He explained, "We live in Washington. We talk like this all the time." I said, "No. With this particular election, if you learn that someone you love is supporting the other candidate, you can lose a friendship." But when I think back on that night, I admire the people who sat around the table. They loved each other. They had been friends a long time. They explored other opinions. They did not run away from controversy; they ran into it, but they did it with the greatest respect for one another. They were still able to sit together at one table, listen, argue, laugh, and share a meal. If you intend to eat together, you better get along. Otherwise, any argument hurts more if it happens at a meal.

St. Paul understood this problem when responding to the Thessalonians in today's second reading. In their community people often shared a common meal. Neighbors brought the produce of their farms, cooked together, ate together and played together. But two problems had come up in Thessaloniki. Some people who had not worked hard before the meal still came to eat the food. Other people who showed up at the meal spent their time gossiping. Paul reminded them how he and his companions acted when they visited there. He writes, "We did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day, we worked.... In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food." Even today, each of us has these responsibilities. We should work for the common good, and we should talk about other people with respect.

Now that the campaign has passed, our community remains divided. The campaign did not create divisions. It revealed divisions that already exist. Many members of this Catholic community found themselves having to make the unhappy choice between one presidential candidate who favored access to abortion and another whose posture on immigration threatened to divide families, foment prejudice, and create obstacles on the road to citizenship. As Mr. Trump prepares to take office, people with fears about racial and ethnic prejudice in our community will need consolation. We all have hard work ahead to listen to the concerns that many voices raised during the campaign, and to work together to resolve them.

Like my friends gathered around a table in Washington DC, we gather around this table. We do not always see eye to eye, but we should be able to talk heart to heart. If we work for the benefit others and speak about them with respect, we will build a community worthy of this table, the eucharist.