

August 25, 2013 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
Inclusion and Exclusion

Our Scripture readings today start with the last chapter of the prophet Isaiah.

We read from that same chapter in early July.

In that July reading we heard about the joy of a child resting in a mother's lap
 ... and how we are most at peace resting, praying in the lap of the Lord.

In today's reading, Isaiah continues in that very positive mood and tells us how welcoming, how *inclusive* the Lord has always been.

The Lord invites people of *all* nations and *all* languages ... no *exclusions*, no exceptions ... *all* are welcome in the kingdom of God.

It's no surprise, then, that today's Psalm response picks up on that joyful theme:
 As you can see on that card you got when you entered church today:

Psalm 117

Ant: Go out to *all* the world and tell the Good News.

Ps: Praise the Lord, *all* you nations;

Glorify him, *all* you peoples!

For steadfast is his kindness toward us,

And the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.

What a unique psalm!

It's the shortest of the 150 psalms, yet packed with such a dynamic message.

Yes, God wants people *all* over the world -- not just a few, not just those from Judea, not just Galilee, not just from neighboring Egypt, Turkey, Arabia.

Yes, God wants *all* to know their God, their creator, their loving parent.

In the Gospel Jesus continues that theme of invitation and welcoming.

“And 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.”

Are we ready for that banquet?

We have *all* been invited!!

Do we have a choice? Well, yes.

God includes *all* in the invitation.

God invites but we get to make the choice.

We can choose to *exclude* ourselves from the kingdom of God.

We can ignore or even refuse God's invitation.

We can think that the moral or spiritual doorway into the Kingdom is simply too narrow for us.

In a way that seems odd, doesn't it?

After all, God is infinite.

God made *all*.

God loves *all* that God made.

God's love is *inclusive*; it's for *all*.

We are made in the image and likeness of God.

Therefore, we are wired, we are designed, we have the genes to be like God.

We are wired, we are designed, we have the genes to also be *inclusive* in our love.

Somehow, in our human limitations (yes, we are not infinite) we also can fall short in our imitating our God.

We can choose to *exclude* God.

We certainly have experiences of *excluding* other persons in our lives.

We, unlike God, *exclude* others because of some differences with them

- Maybe they have hurt us physically or with words
- Maybe they are simply different from us
 - Maybe I am old and they are young
 - Maybe I am poor and they are rich
 - Maybe I am Christian and they are Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim
- Maybe I think: "I can't love them; even God can't love them."
- Maybe our *exclusion* is at a conscious level or maybe it is hidden way deeper within us
- We have certainly heard the words for such kinds of *exclusion*:
 - Bias
 - Bigotry
 - Nationalism
 - Sexism
 - Racism

My most recent experience happened just last Monday.

We went shopping at one of those sprawling suburban malls.

As we got out of the car we noticed a young man, mid-20s or so.

He was wearing a back pack and looked a little suspicious.

He was wandering thru the parked cars, looking in some of them.

I wondered if I should call the police.

As he zigzagged through the parked cars he raised his hand up in the air.

Was he signaling to some someone else in his gang?

What did he have in his hand?

Oh, it was his keys.

He was pushing the button on his key fob.

Oh, he was trying to get his car to light up or beep or click or something.

He was simply lost and trying to find his car!

So, why this concern on my part?

Was it because he was wearing a back pack ...looking suspicious ... or was it because he was Arab-American?

Lumping people together and judging them has long been a way we *exclude* others. Using hurtful names for those we want to *exclude* often happens in time of war or other times of turmoil – in the world, in our cities, in our neighborhoods, and even in our very own families.

Sometimes it takes examples or pictures to help us overcome *exclusion*.

Last week there was an internet photo that would help us dispel our opinion about *all* Muslims.

The photo, which has gone viral, shows over 20 men in Muslim clothing standing hand in hand with each other in front of a Catholic cathedral while people were at Mass inside.

The cathedral had been an announced target of some extremists and the Muslim men were there to show their protection of their Christian neighbors.

[Link: <http://www.christianpost.com/news> -- 8-22-2013]

Our two words for today have been: *include* and *exclude*.

As today's Scriptures tell us: God loves all and God *includes* all in an invitation to have a relationship with God, to join God in the kingdom of God.

On the other hand we can choose to *exclude* ourselves from any relationship with God, from the kingdom of God.

We can also choose to *exclude* groups of people and individuals from any relationships with us.

Let's take some time today at Mass to talk with God about *include* and *exclude*.