

July 12th, 2020: 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Year A

First Reading: Isaiah 55.10-11

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 65.9abcd, 9e-10, 11-12, 13 (R. Lk 8.8)

Second Reading: Romans 8.18-23

Gospel: Matthew 13.1-23

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

Summer time is often vacation time and one type of vacation I really enjoy is road trips. I recall going on one such trip to California a number of years ago and stopping off in San Francisco. We visited Alcatraz island and also went out for some Chinese food, which was amazingly delicious! All in all, California is a beautiful state and San Francisco is a beautiful city.

That being said, something recently happened in a San Francisco park that was not beautiful at all, as a group of about 100 people tore down a statue of St. Junipero Serra. He was a Spanish Catholic missionary during the 18th century who founded nine Catholic missions in the area that would later become California. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Junipero helped to convert thousands of people to the Catholic Faith and also taught them new forms of agricultural techniques.

So why did this angry mob tear down his statue? Well, some see him as a symbol of European colonialism and claim that he exploited and oppressed Indigenous people, but in reality he was an advocate for Native people and a great promoter of human rights. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/st-junipero-serra-statue-torn-down-in-san-francisco-park-81125>

For instance, during his life Serra once walked all the way from California to Mexico City to request from a Spanish colonial leader the authority to protect the Native people from abuse by colonial forces in California. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5klz3iGKU4>

It was because of his life of prayer and holy acts such as this that Pope Francis canonized St. Junipero a saint in 2015, and at this ceremony the Holy Father said “[he] sought to defend the dignity of the [N]ative community, to protect it from those who had mistreated and abused it”.

(<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/st-junipero-serra-statue-torn-down-in-san-francisco-park-81125>)

Those who tore down the statue of St. Junipero failed the test of history. They were so gripped by their false obsession that he was a racist that they tried to erase his blessed legacy by committing this act of public desecration. As I reflect on this, I think this twisted and senseless act was influenced by what is known as the “cancel culture.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5kz3iGKU4>.

So, what do I mean by *cancel culture*? This generally refers to a form of boycott in which some person, often a celebrity, is criticized by a group of people on social media for saying or doing something that is considered socially offensive. That person is then “cancelled”.

In other words, he or she is socially rejected by a large number of people. This can involve vicious on-line character attacks and a massive decline in the person’s fanbase and career. To “cancel” someone is to communicate to others that this person does not matter anymore, and that whatever credibility or popularity he or she used to have has now ended. What’s more, being “cancelled” isn’t just limited to public figures. Some might “cancel” people in their own social networks who offend or annoy them.

<https://www.insidehook.com/article/internet/youthsplaining-everything-you-need-to-know-about-cancel-culture> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9WiyxZqoUE>

We might associate the cancel culture only with the rejection of people who are alive, but, as I said, I think this growing practice of trying to “cancel” others influenced the mob that tore down the statue of St. Junipero Serra. Through their actions, they were saying “Hey! We don’t agree with what we think Serra stands for, so we are going to try to eliminate people’s devotion to him – we are going to ‘cancel’ him!”

Of course, this vicious mob did not “cancel” St. Junipero Serra - he is in heaven right now praising God with all his angels and saints and interceding for us here on earth. And shortly after this public act of

sacrilege took place, the Archbishop of San Francisco and several dozen Catholics joined in prayer at the park where the statue of Serra came toppling down. As the Archbishop proclaimed, “Evil has made itself present here. So we have gathered together to pray...asking God's mercy on us and on the whole city....”. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/after-st-junpero-serra-statue-torn-down-in-san-francisco-archbishop-cordileone-offers-exorcism-prayers-19833>

As Catholic-Christians, we are part of the surrounding culture. And yet we are called to join with Christ in transforming those parts of the culture that are not aligned with his Good News, such as this false idea of “cancelling” others. We are reminded of this in today’s Gospel reading, taken from Matthew 13.

In it we hear Jesus describe the parable of the sower, in which a very enthusiastic farmer generously sows seeds on four different types of soil- some seeds fell on a path, others on rocky ground, others among thorns, and some fell on good soil.

As we hear, the seeds on the path represent people who learn about the Gospel but really don’t care about it and so the saving Truth is snatched away from them by Satan. The seeds sown on rocky ground highlight those who initially say “yes” to the Lord but end up abandoning him once things get difficult, such as being persecuted.

And the seeds sown among thorns depict those whose call to discipleship is crowded out by their desire for power and riches. Lastly, the seeds sown on good soil are those blessed persons who faithfully follow the Lord’s call and share the Good News with others. This is what you and I are called to!

Another important aspect of this parable is to recognize that Jesus is the sower of the seed, he is the generous farmer spreading seeds all around. In other words, Jesus openly invites **all** people to share in the kingdom of God; Jesus doesn’t “cancel” anyone (Pitre, MRE)!

We must imitate Our Lord in this! You and I are called to generously share the truth of the Risen Lord Jesus with others and to not restrict our witnessing efforts only to some.

That being said, it is important to recognize where people are at and to respect their freedom. For instance, if one were to ask a neighbor if she had ever heard of All Saints Catholic Church and she said “I don’t want anything to do with the Catholic Church” then its best if we first work on building a trusting relationship with her, with the idea of inviting her to Mass later on.

Thus, we do not “cancel” or give up on people who seem to resist Our Lord. We must keep generously praying for others, doing acts of mercy and charity, and openly inviting others to encounter Christ. Just like Jesus, we must keep sowing seeds no matter what type of soil we come across!

A great example of this is Sr. Maria Laura Mainetti, a religious sister who was martyred in a park about 20 years ago by 3 teenage girls in northern Italy. The girls lured Sr. Maria into the park and then began shouting abuses at her and ended up killing her as part of a Satanic ritual. And while this was going on, Sr. Maria prayed for her attackers and asked God to forgive them. According to some accounts, the last words she spoke on this earth were “Lord, forgive them”.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-declares-sister-maria-laura-mainetti-killed-in-satanic-ritual-a-martyr-72635>

What a model of holy generosity! Let us pray that we can also demonstrate such virtue in these challenging times. Again, we are not to “cancel” or give up on others but to generously share the Gospel through our words and actions and to be a constant witness for Our Lord, no matter what struggles and resistance we may face. We know this is not always easy but it is ultimately joyful as “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18).