

Letter from Bulletin of September 15, 2002

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Dear Parishioners,

You remember the old New Yorker cartoon that showed an elderly successful pastor telling his young associate, "You'll go a long way in the ministry as long as you never discuss politics or religion!!!" We clearly ignore that advice around here. I believe our responsibility is not precisely to discuss politics but rather to address and discuss justice. Since justice can often be put in place only through structural change as well as adjustment of laws and systems, politics becomes a necessary step in the discussion - not partisan politics or advocacy of candidates, but political solutions and legislative remedies. Acts of compassion, personal assistance and charity have always been clear to us as part of the gospel mandate for believers. In 1971 Catholic Bishops gathered with the Pope in Rome and reminded us that the gospel mandate goes beyond charity: *"Action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."* There may well be discussion and disagreement among believers as to the best approaches and solutions, but not about the mandate to seek justice not only in personal relationships but in the structure and systems that impact our world.

I've noted before the four essential pillars that under gird any healthy Christian spirituality, what one author has called "the four non-negotiable pillars of the spiritual life." Jesus models them in his ministry and called for them specifically in Chapter VI of Matthew's gospel. (1) **personal prayer and private morality-integrity** (in the gospels, fidelity in keeping Christ's

commands is the only real criterion to tell true prayer from illusion); (2) **social justice** (in the Jewish prophets the quality of faith depends upon the character of justice in the land and in the gospels one out of every ten lines deals with the poor and God calls to respond to them); (3) **mellowness of heart and spirit** (our task is to transform the world through love and justice but not from anger or guilt; only one kind of person transforms the world spiritually, someone with a grateful heart.); and finally, (4) **community as a constitutive part of true worship** (without community, without church one risks more private fantasy and an unfronted life than real faith). There is a lot of talk about Spirituality without religion and being religious without church; however, spirituality is ultimately communitarian, even within faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Taoism that are not so structured as Judaism and Christianity. Why? Because the search for God is not a private search for what is highest for oneself or even what is ultimate for one's self. Spirituality is about a communal search for the face of God - and one searches communally only within an historical, concrete community.

Your Pastor,
Brian Joyce