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EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Diversity

Diversity is a controversial topic across the world nowadays. People seem afraid or intolerant of almost anything different or unfamiliar. Yet variety and diversity are the norm of life, the basis of all reality. Nature is a perfect example. So is music, art, literature, and science – and, of course, people. Diversity is the most enriching and intriguing feature of humanity. Sadly, it also is the most problematic, too often used as a pretext or justification for war, prejudice, persecution, and discrimination. America, Christianity (especially Catholicism), and cities, however, offer a clear contrast to the prevailing negative perspectives on diversity in our contemporary world.

The United States is not a typical country like, for instance, Italy, Japan, or Kenya, where almost everyone shares the same natural origin. We are a land of immigrants, with a polyglot assortment of identities. Immigrants have shaped our national destiny. They are part of our American uniqueness. From the original, unbidden, settlers who pushed themselves on the continent, gradually appropriating the lands of the natives, to the throngs of refugees fleeing civil chaos and injustice today, immigrants and their diversity have always defined American history. They created this country and broadened our borders. The South relied on unwilling immigrants, the slaves, for labor and a comfortable, plantation style of life. The Chinese built our railroads. Contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric, then, is a denial of a consistent pro-immigrant pattern in American history. The legacy of immigrants is a diversity that enlivens and enriches our culture in a way no other nation can claim. America, as such, is a model of embracing and integrating diversity in a way that benefits everyone.

The Church is another immediate example of diversity. Christianity is a world-wide religion. Catholicism, the biggest part of Christianity, has itself over one billion members. “Catholic” means “universal” in Greek, and is one of the so-called four marks of the Church. Jesus commissioned the disciples “to go out to all the world and tell the Good News.” Catholic or Christian, then, implies being comfortable with diversity.

Cities are, by definition, eclectic. They attract professionals and techies, non-conformists, and creative types, young and old. Cities have everything and include everyone. They provide services and offer opportunities not available anywhere else. In the Bible, heaven is consistently described as a city, perhaps because it a symbol of total inclusion.

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