

6th Sunday of Easter – year B

1. There are few groups of people more puzzling to us than skinheads
 - a. Not because of their clothes
 - b. Nor because of their tattoos and piercings
 - c. And certainly not because of their shaved heads!
2. But because of their fanatical devotion to Adolf Hitler
 - a. Whose madness was responsible for the extermination of millions of Jews, Slavs, gypsies, gays and the handicapped,
 - b. And whose blind ambition resulted in the horrors of the 2nd World War.
3. I mean, anyone would have to be crazy to ignore all this.
 - a. But sociologists would say to us; not crazy; afraid.
 - b. Skinheads are who they are
 - i. Because they are afraid of those who are different
 - ii. Afraid of their abilities and advantages,
 - iii. Afraid that one-day they will make US into THEM.
 - c. Hitler is really just the catalyst that converts that fear into brutal action.
 - d. Even so, who would want to idolize him?
4. A young boy named Danny would.
5. He idolizes Hitler through his older skinhead brother Derek,
 - a. Who is in jail because he kicked a young black man to death.
6. Because Danny wrote a history paper
 - a. Praising Hitler as one of the greatest heroes of the 20th century
 - b. His teacher orders him to write another paper
 - i. About how Derek ended up in jail.
7. The title of the paper, and the movie which is its story is *American History X*
 - a. The movie is not something that would normally get mentioned in Sunday sermons.
 - b. It is brutal, profane and deeply disturbing.
8. At one point Derek chooses
 - a. To break his ties with the skinheads in prison and go it alone.
 - b. He is brutalized by them and ends up in the infirmary.
9. Afterward he is assigned to the laundry with a young black man named Lamont
 - a. Lamont knows about Derek and his prejudices
 - b. And all Derek needs to know about Lamont is the color of his skin.
10. And yet as Lamont helps Derek learn how to do the laundry
 - a. He talks to Derek and gets him to respond
 - b. He jokes with Derek and gets him to laugh
 - c. He warns Derek that he needs friends to watch his back.
11. OF course Derek knows this – for as the date of his release draws near he knows the other skinheads would never let him leave;
 - a. He would be killed for daring to go it alone.
12. And yet it never happens, and as Derek prepares to leave he realizes why;
 - a. Lamont had gotten his black friends to watch Derek's back.
 - b. Horror of horrors! Lamont had made HIM one of THEM.
 - c. And because of THEM, HE was now free.

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13. Such fear is not just the stuff of skinhead movies.
 - a. We see it the way we treat people who live in the street
 - b. The way we ignore those who are sick or in prison
 - c. The way we look at foreigners,
14. Such fear is not new; only its objects are
 - a. In this century it is the fear of the Mexicans and the Muslims
 - b. In the last century it was fear of the “Japs” and the “Commies”
 - i. And In today’s first reading it was fear of the Gentiles.
 - ii. And in the Gospel reading it was fear of the Jews.
15. It wasn’t that Jews and gentiles did not mix; they did.
 - a. Gentiles attended synagogue services as guests all over the Empire
 - b. And when Jesus was preached about in these synagogues,
 - i. Many gentiles and Jews came to believe in him.
 - c. They formed churches.
 - i. In some Gentiles were welcomed;
 1. We catch a glimpse of one such congregation
 2. Behind the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel
 - ii. In others, they were not;
 1. And we catch a glimpse of one such congregation
 2. Behind the words of today’s first reading.
 - d. There was fighting in the congregation
 - i. Which heard Peter in today’s first reading
 - e. There was persecution of the congregation
 - i. Which first read the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel
 - f. But be it fighting or persecution the reason for it all is the same: fear.
 - i. Fear of the gentile, fear of the Jew.
16. Which is why when Peter sees that God pours out the Spirit on Jew and Gentile alike he proclaims that GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY
 - a. Even though we all too often do.
17. Which is why Jesus tells his disciples - all his disciples from the first century to the 21st - to love one another.
 - a. Even though we all too often don’t.
18. Because even though we spend our lives justifying our fear
 - a. By dividing the world up into US and THEM
 - b. God does not; for God there are no us and them – only us.
19. I hope none of you here today were offended
 - a. By bringing up skinheads at the start of this homily
20. I don’t think any of us are skinheads,
 - a. Though skin may be more visible on some heads than others!
21. I did it because when you put a skinhead and a black man together, you usually get the same thing you get whenever you put two different types of people together:
 - a. Fear, suspicion and occasionally even violence.
 - b. Because the last thing anyone of US would want to be is one of the THEM.
22. But in the movie *American History X* something happened with Danny and Lamont

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- a. As they worked together
 - b. Each saw himself in the other,
 - c. And thus came to respect the other
 - d. And to reject the fear of the other and the hatred it creates.
23. What happened there?
- a. We might say they overcame their prejudice through communication
 - b. We might say they discovered friendship despite their divisions
 - c. We might say they were just acting.
24. But I think what Peter would have said is that they saw each other as God sees us all – with no partiality.
25. And I think Jesus would have said that they had learned how to love each other.
- a. Because that is what love is for Jesus –
 - b. It is not emotion but motivational
 - c. Not affection but it is effective;
26. For it is simply seeing “them” no matter who they are,
- a. Be they blacks or whites,
 - b. Muslims or Jews,
 - c. Gays or straights,
 - d. Rich or poor,
 - e. Women or men,
 - f. Republicans or Democrats,
 - g. A German Pope visiting Israel
 - h. . . . Or an American President visiting Notre Dame
27. As God sees them;
28. As Jesus says we must see them
29. And thus seeing them for who they truly are;
30. Not them . . . but us. And then treating them that way.
31. With respect, with patience, with love.