

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As we watched the Funeral of Queen Elizabeth on Monday evening perhaps we were looking out for signs of connection and for signs of separation. The huge numbers of people who were lining the streets of London to see her funeral procession was a sign of how connected they felt to her. The unprecedented television audience for the Funeral was another sign of connectedness. The newly recruited naval orderlies were physically connected to the gun carriage that bore the queen's coffin. Perhaps the signs of separation were there when Heads of State and ordinary people were gathered in the same Westminster Abbey, but all were carefully assigned their proper places. The uniforms that people wore could have been seen both as signs of connection and of separation.

We live in a world where people choose to be connected or disconnected with a whole range of other people. We have just heard Jesus tell a parable about a man who choose not to be connected to another man who was physically very close to him. One man was rich and lived in great comfort. The other was so poor and sick that he longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. In time both men died. The poor man was carried by angels into heaven. The rich man was buried.

The lack of connection that the rich man chose to live by was magnified after his death. We are told that there was a great gap between him suffering in Hades, and the poor man enjoying his reward in heaven. The gap was so great that it could not be crossed.

When we choose to be attentive to those around us who are in need, then there will be no gap to be crossed when we are called to our heavenly reward. When we live our lives in the service of others, we are forming bonds that can never be broken. On Monday night we heard Archbishop Welby speak in those terms about Queen Elizabeth. "People of loving service are rare in any walk of life. Leaders of loving service are still rarer. But in all cases those who serve will be loved and remembered when those who cling to power and privileges are long forgotten."

Today is being celebrated around the world as Migrant and Refugee Sunday. Pope Francis wrote a message for this day. He talked about building the future with migrants and refugees. He said, "No one must be excluded. God's plan is essentially inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. Among them are many migrants and refugees, displaced persons, and victims of trafficking. The Kingdom of God is to be built *with them*, for without them it would not be the Kingdom that God wants. The inclusion of those

most vulnerable is the necessary condition for full citizenship in God's Kingdom. Indeed, the Lord says, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me" (*Mt 25:34-36*).

Building the future with migrants and refugees also means recognizing and valuing how much each of them can contribute to the process of construction. I like to see this approach to migration reflected in a prophetic vision of Isaiah, which considers foreigners not invaders or destroyers, but willing labourers who rebuild the walls of the new Jerusalem, that Jerusalem whose gates are open to all peoples (cf. *Is 60:10-11*).

In Isaiah's prophecy, the arrival of foreigners is presented as a source of enrichment: "The abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, and the wealth of the nations shall come to you" (*Is 60:5*). Indeed, history teaches us that the contribution of migrants and refugees has been fundamental to the social and economic growth of our societies. This continues to be true in our own day. Their work, their youth, their enthusiasm and their willingness to sacrifice enrich the communities that

receive them. Yet this contribution could be all the greater were it optimized and supported by carefully developed programs and initiatives. Enormous potential exists, ready to be harnessed, if only it is given a chance."

Pope Francis concluded his message for this Sunday with a prayer:

"Lord, make us bearers of hope,
so that where there is darkness,
your light may shine,
and where there is discouragement,
confidence in the future may be reborn.
Lord, make us instruments of your justice,
so that where there is exclusion, fraternity may flourish,
and where there is greed, a spirit of sharing may grow.
Lord, make us builders of your Kingdom,
together with migrants and refugees
and with all who dwell on the peripheries.
Lord, let us learn how beautiful it is
to live together as brothers and sisters. Amen."