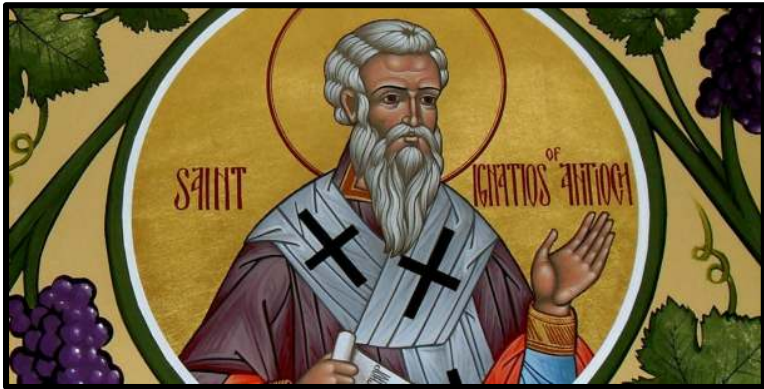




“I come to gather nations of every language...”

FRIENDS, I have been thinking about this and wanting to write and share my thoughts for some time. What is “this” that I have been thinking about? How blessed we are to be Catholic in every sense of the word. As I’m sure you’re aware, we have been called catholic from the time very early in the Second Century when Saint Ignatius of Antioch first said, **“See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is administered either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude of the people also be; even as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”**

—Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ch 8 (*emphasis added*)



Icon of Saint Ignatius of Antioch

The Catholic Church is Universal

Specifically what I have been thinking about is the universality we can experience right here in our own little parish. We have a visiting priest from Africa, and two deacons of Hispanic heritage. Looking around the church we can see people and families from Mexico, Puerto Rico and several Central American countries. This is a blessing for us whether we realize it or not.

And yes there are some people who grumble, or as today’s Gospel says, “wailing and grinding of teeth” about the difficulty of understanding the speech of non-native speaker. If Jesus himself spoke to us today in his native language, the only way any of us could understand his words would be simply by the grace of God. Yes, we are blessed to be in this place in this time, surrounded by multiple languages. We are blessed with the great gift of our faith and blessed by the fact that we are members of the Church that Jesus himself established.

In the first reading Isaiah speaks on behalf of God that people will be sent to every corner of the earth so that all may know who He is. It’s very hard to imagine today with all of the technology we have and the many means of communication, that there are still people and places in the world who have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But I can tell you that right here in our little corner of the world, we have many among us who at the very least do not have confidence in themselves to be able to share that Gospel. I have parents who sign their children up for religion classes and when I ask if they might be interested in helping out in the classroom, they are almost all very hesitant to volunteer because they feel a real lack of confidence that they will be able to answer specific questions.

Of course, this is kind of an outlier, since we have very good materials and lots of ways to get answers to those questions. It would be good for all of us to get comfortable with the response that “I don’t know the answer but will try to find out and get back to you.” We don’t need to have the answer for every question that comes up, nor is it really possible to have the answers to all those questions. There is a reason we associate ‘mystery’ with our faith.

All discipline seems a cause... for pain

The passage from Hebrews tells of chastisement and discipline. The author writes, **“You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children: Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reprovved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges.”**

Remember, our day-to-day goal should be to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, our King, our Lord, our Master, our Teacher, our Redeemer. As disciples we are to apply the disciplines of our Lord so that we can become more and more like him. The discipline written of in Hebrews is more of a form of challenge or punishment that brings about painful growth.

The author says this too, is good for us. **“At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.”** Do you see? He says this discipline is a form of training. That is what discipleship is as well. Training under a particular teacher or master—our teacher just happens to be the Son of God.

This Son took on human flesh and became one of us to become one *with* us. He too underwent a most severe chastisement and punishment. The punishment he endured was meant for us, but he took it upon himself so that we would not have to endure it. (Could we endure it?) The fruit of righteousness became apparent when he rose from his tomb, thus defeating death, which was our justice for sinning against God.