

## FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

June 28, 2020

Zechariah 9:9–10 • Romans 8:9, 11–13 • Matthew 11:25–30

### I.

After I graduated from college,  
I worked as a missionary in the Dominican Republic.

As you may know, the Dominican Republic and its western neighbor, Haiti, share an island the Spanish conquistadors called *La Española* (today Hispaniola), which means, “Little Spain.”

The indigenous inhabitants of the island, the Taíno, died out relatively quickly because of small pox and other diseases brought by Spain.

Then African slaves were brought to the island, who intermarried with Spaniards.

As a result, today most Dominicans are mulattos; they have both black and white ancestry.

Haitians, by contrast, are darker-skinned.

Between 1998 and 1999,  
I lived in worked in a town in the far western part of the Dominican Republic.

Each day, I bathed in the *Río Artibonito*  
that divides the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

During the year I spent in the Dominican Republic,  
I witnessed blatant acts of racism.

A few observations and comments from my experience there.

The capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, is in the east.

As one travels westward, toward the Haitian border,  
one notices that people’s complexion tend to get darker.

The Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo (1891–1961), who ruled the country from 1931 to 1960, bleached his own skin, and he sought to “lighten” the complexion of the country through immigration and by other means.

In general, Dominican notions of beauty favor a Caucasian appearance.

Dominicans often downplay their African heritage in order to emphasize their European ancestry.

Dominicans also look down on Haitians, and their race plays a role.

Haitians are deemed inferior because they have a darker complexion.

Where I lived and worked, I would hear Dominican children lob a cruel insult at one another: *haitiano*—“Haitian.”

Interestingly, people would sometimes call me *Rubio*, meaning, “Blondie.”

I thought that was odd because I have brown hair and even my skin is a bit olive.

But “Blondie” was a relative term: my hair and skin were lighter than that of the people around me.

I remember being surprised by these overtly racist sentiments.

I always thought it was a grave contradiction in a country that was predominantly Catholic.

It’s easier, as an outsider, to spot these kinds of things, and to acknowledge them for what they are.

It’s harder for someone who has grown up with such prejudices.

When it comes to racism in the United States, which is different than in the Dominican Republic, we may lack an “outside” perspective on things.

That is the purpose of the Gospel.

It enables us to see people, and to evaluate society as a whole, from God's point of view.

In today's Gospel, which was also proclaimed on our titular feast a few weeks ago, Christ reveals his Sacred Heart, meaning his person:

“I am meek and humble of heart.”

Meekness—being quiet, humble, and gentle—is a quality in short supply these days.

I believe it is a quality that is urgently needed when it comes to understanding, confronting, and defeating racism.

In my opinion, our country continues to talk past itself.

There doesn't seem to be much dialogue.

There should be an outcry of righteous indignation amid injustice; but there must also be dialogue if people's hearts and minds are to change.

Unfortunately, the tendency in political discourse these days seems to be on having a “viral” moment of fame, on getting the last word, on not giving people the benefit of the doubt, on taking words out of context, and on being unwilling to acknowledge that another person might be at least partially correct.

Do we think that such an approach will help someone to change his or her mind?

The first step is for each person to humbly examine his or her own life experiences.

These events may have engendered biases and prejudices that the person did not necessarily choose.

Another step is to learn about other people's experiences, which are often different from our own.

A third step is to listen and converse, without rash judgment.

Being meek does not mean being a doormat.

Christ, who voluntarily accepted torture and death, was not a pushover.

He challenged those who accused, beat, and crucified him unjustly—without ever resorting to violence or vitriol.

As our country grapples with the longstanding scourge of racism, there are legitimate cries for equality and justice, but there are also reprehensible acts of violence and destruction.

In San Francisco, a statue of St. Junípero Serra (1713–1784) was toppled, on the grounds that this great missionary abused indigenous persons.

This was a rush to judgment, and an unwillingness to examine the matter carefully.

The conquest and evangelization of the New World, sadly, included offenses, but not everyone was a villain; there were saints.

St. Junípero, whom Pope Francis canonized in Washington, DC in 2015, did approve of corporal punishment, which was accepted at that time, and he did display a paternalistic attitude toward Native Americans.

But he also bravely championed the rights of indigenous persons, he cared for them as spiritual shepherd, and he defended them against Spanish soldiers, who were often abusive.

## II.

For a Christian, being meek and civil are not optional.

Christ tells us that God reveals himself to those who are meek:

“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,  
for although you have hidden these things  
from the wise and the learned  
you have revealed them to little ones.”

Those who are willing to become “little ones” by quashing our pride become more effective heralds of the Gospel.

God is waiting for us to act.