

**06/19/16 ..... 12 C**

-- Paul of Tarsus was born and educated in a devout Jewish family. That fact set his identity growing up. He held fiercely to his religious convictions. He resisted those whom he believed compromised it, including that rebel group first called "The Way" and then Christians.

-- But through a conversion experience on the road to Damascus, and after several years of reflecting on this experience, he came to see that tribal identity wasn't so important. His ethnic origin and religious practice gradually took a back seat to the love God had shown him through Jesus Christ, whose followers he originally harassed.

-- The letter to the Galatians, which we're now reading for the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in a row, reflects on his experience and how that changed everything. It's an "anti-tribe" letter. The traditional barriers of race, ethnicity, sex, social status and the like are broken down after Jesus Christ has come.

-- We can't turn the clock back to an ideal, previous age. God has invited all men and women to share his life through what Jesus did for us in his life, death and resurrection.

-- I believe that what St. Paul was speaking about has something to say about the horror and tragedy of a week ago in Orlando, and how we are called to respond to it.

-- A troubled man with a confused mix of motivations burst into a well-known gay bar in Orlando and began shooting. Only after a couple of hours of horror was he taken down as he tried to shoot his way out.

-- We still are learning more about him. But it is evident that one of the reasons he went there was a hatred of gay people. This seemed to be coupled with his confusion about his own sexual identity, not uncommon among those engaged in gay bashing. What was uncommon was his ability to handle firearms as well.

-- He came from the Islamic faith which, like Catholicism, believes that homosexual behavior is not in keeping with God's plan. But he also

showed the tribalism that echoes his heroes in ISIS who believe they have a narrow way to salvation which the whole world must accept.

-- I can't give you a simple solution to how we oppose this type of thought and action. There is no simple solution.

-- But what St. Paul tells us echoes our belief that our common human dignity, which all of us have as children of God, surpasses all of our differences. It remains with us even when we sin. We are still children of God, redeemed through Jesus Christ.

-- This calls us to examine our attitudes toward those different from us. It doesn't mean we condone or approve of sinful behavior. St. Paul will have something to say about that in next week's reading.

-- But it does mean we respect the human dignity of all people, including those we believe are on the wrong path. It means that Catholics should have no part in gay-bashing or in painting any religious tradition with broad strokes as uniformly evil.

-- As St. Paul says, we belong to Christ and so are all Abraham's descendants. Judaism, Christianity and Islam explicitly claim him as their common ancestor. But there is a true sense in which all human beings are a part of that family.

-- For we have been claimed and loved by Jesus Christ. He gave his life for all of us. Many people after him have risked their lives to uphold the safety and dignity of others.

-- We are here because we profess to be followers of Jesus. The least we can do is to stand up for the human dignity of those around us. In particular, we must protect the dignity of those who are harassed because of their faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation or any other tribal factor.

-- For God came to save **all** of us through Jesus Christ.