

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jul 4th 2014

“I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Matthew

As a child I always disliked the Stations of the Cross because the version our parish used laid a super guilt trip on us about what huge sinners we were and what our sins had done to Jesus.

Fighting with my siblings? Talking in class? Gossiping about others? In our farm town, there weren't a lot of terrible sins you even COULD commit, especially attending a Catholic school that did its best to enforce virtue.

My parents were paragons of righteousness and clearly wanted us to be too. So how do we, who try diligently to BE righteous, respond to the unsettling remark in today's gospel that Jesus didn't really come for us? Sorry.

In meditating on what Jesus might be telling us, I take my clue from both Independence Day, celebrated today in the US, and from Pope Francis.

Jesus certainly came for the poor and rejected of the world – people like immigrants, refugees and other oppressed people. I believe that he also came to teach the privileged (among whom are many of us righteous) that we must be in solidarity for and with the world's outcasts as the Jesuits tell us.

On this special day, Americans, especially, must also take to heart the admonition in the hymn “America the Beautiful” to “crown thy good with brotherhood” and join Jesus in embracing those whom society rejects. Only then can we really consider ourselves “righteous.”

We also can be “righteous” without being self-righteous as Pope Francis so wonderfully reminds us. Of course we all sin even if rather boringly. Even the best of us sin enough that when we are inclined to condemn others we need to ask ourselves, as the Pope does, “Who am I to judge?”

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