

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 14th 2017

“Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

Luke

When I was a kid in the 1950's, I felt pretty smug because I had the good fortune to be born Catholic. Like many other Catholics, I believed we had a lock on truth and salvation.

Sure it seemed easier to be a Protestant. They could eat meat on Fridays and public school kids didn't have to spend their noon hours in October saying the rosary at the grotto like we did. But we had the truth and they didn't so warbling through an off key rendition of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” during Advent was worth it.

Then along came my favorite saint, Pope John XXIII. The news got through to my Nebraska farm town and elsewhere that God loves everyone who tries to sincerely hear his word and follow it, just as St. Luke tells us in today's gospel “Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

It wasn't that theological differences no longer mattered, but charity, which had been sadly lacking on both sides of the Reformation divide, mattered a lot more. We learned that our “separated brethren” could indeed “hear the word of God and observe it” just as we could. How could we have been so unchristian for all those centuries?

When Pope John (now St. John XXIII) died on my 16th birthday, it was like losing a member of my family because he did so much for the entire human family. He even helped us realize that God loves non-Christians when he reminded us that, “spiritually we are Semites.”

I thought of how delighted Pope John would be to know that Nebraska's Lutherans are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at my beloved St. John's Church on Creighton's campus because it is larger than any of their churches. Like us, these good people are trying to hear and observe the word of God.

The spirit of St. John XXIII lives at St. John's.

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