

**June 25, 2017**  
**12th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Let the heavens and the earth praise God the seas and whatever moves in them.**

*When do we praise God? Every time we help those around us.*

Different traditions and practices have developed over the centuries to praise God. Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr writes of the way Jesus did. “*He always went where the pain was. There he touched, and there he healed. That’s what he did on the Cross. He emptied himself of concern for himself in favor of concern for us.*” Jesus praised his Father by caring for the people around him.

The two Jesuits who were making their retreat here last week told me how they praise God. They teach in an inner-city high school near Watts in Los Angeles called, Verbum Dei (Word of God) composed of Hispanic and African-American students. The school offers a highly successful program for these students. In the past sixteen years, every student attending has graduated, a remarkable record for any school. Serving these students is praising God.

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We praise God whenever we care for the inconvenient, Rick Reynolds, a Free Methodist minister writes about this in his “*Sustaining Spirituality to do Justice*” in the AMOS magazine, Fall, 2016.

“*Jesus does not keep people at arms length. He loves all the people that we find difficult to love - rich, poor. Republicans. Democrats. Anarchists. Libertarians and more. Jesus loves the irritating coworker in the next cubicle, the neighbor who has a junk car in the front yard, a brother-in-law who forgot to pay back the \$100 he borrowed last year. Yep, Jesus loves all the crabby, broken, mean people. Thank God.*

“*I have many times visited homeless camps late at night. We would bring socks, blankets, and hot pizza in the night. My mood matched the weather as I left the camp. I was wet, tired, cranky. I have been doing this for 35 years. I'm getting too old for this. I'm feeling it.*

[SEP] “*And then a voice in my head asked, ‘Do you do this because people are thankful to you for the pizza? Or are you doing this because it is the right thing to do?’ It's 10 pm. I'm soaking wet, but now I'm smiling. Suddenly, mystically, I was refreshed. I'm doing the right thing, because it is the right thing to do. I'm not here for the thanks and praise from homeless people. This is what we are all to do – to love our neighbors with service when advocacy.*” Serving such is a beautiful way to praise God.

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My brother Jesuit, Fr. Greg Boyle, offers this almost amusing example of how different people view praising God. Homeboy Industries, the hugely successful gang-intervention program he founded in east Los Angeles, receives a host of visitors. In one such visit, he was asked, “*And when do you here praise God?*” Greg answered, “*Well, pretty much everyday from 8 to 4.*” Helping those gang members is praising God.

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We praise God whenever we de-emphasize divisions among us. I refer again to Greg Boyle in an article about him in the current issue of US Catholic. In it, he makes this point: “*Next year we will celebrate 30 years at homeboy Industries. Since the beginning, a lot of things have changed. We used to work with gangs and not just gang members. Now, we don't work with gangs because we don't believe in it. If you work with “gangs,” you serve the cohesion of the gang. You simply supply oxygen to the gang. We don't want to do that anymore.*”

Not naming others as enemies of Christ’s message does not give that an identity, it keeps the focus on Christ’s message, which is another way of praising God.

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We praise God whenever we promote unity amid diversity. Louis Kovar, a minister in the United Church of Christ, writes in the Winter issue of the Seattle-based magazine, “*A Matter of Spirit*”: “*Research in social science since the mid-1980s as demonstrated that overcoming social divisions like racism class and immigration status, can best be accomplished by inter-group work. In the process of working together on shared projects, individuals discovered that there is a common ground shared with those different from them.*

“*My neighborhood worked together on outside projects which led to a greater level of cohesion among various groups. Evangelical Christians, Muslim, gay and lesbian families discovered that they shared common values for quality-of-life: their children's education, and the care of their elders. The result has been a reduction in the cycles of fear based on racism, Islamophobia and homophobia as well as an overall increase in community cohesion.*

“*Churches and religious groups attempts to overcome prejudice through sermons and education have little impact in changing fear-based rhetoric. Instead creating opportunities for people to work together with other groups brings a change of heart and mind.*”

The financial support St. Mary is giving St. Aloysius High School for Girls in Uganda is praising God.

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