

Celebration of the diversity

Dear brothers and sisters,

Once upon a time a city dweller stopped by a village shepherd who was keeping his sheep. After introducing himself the visitor began asking a number of curious questions about the sheep.

He asked: "How long would a sheep normally walk in a day?"

The shepherd asked back: "About which sheep you want to know? Is it about the white sheep or about the black sheep?"

After a moment's reflection, the visitor said: "About the white sheep".

"The white sheep walk approximately four kilometers a day", answered the shepherd.

"What about the black sheep?", asked the visitor.

They also walk four kilometers a day!

"How much a sheep need to eat per day?", came the next question.

"About the white sheep or about the black sheep", enquired the shepherd.

"About the white sheep", answered the visitor.

"They need three kilograms of grass", answered the shepherd.

"What then about the black sheep?", asked the visitor curiously.

"They also eat three kilos of grass per day!"

The visitor was surprised about the shepherd's answers.

But he did not want to give up.

"How much wool would a sheep produce in a year?, he asked.

"The white sheep or the black ones", the shepherd repeated his usual question.

"Of the white ones", answered the visitor.

"They produce about five bundles of wool.

"What about the black ones?", asked the visitor.

"They also produce about five bundles of wool.", answered the shepherd.

The visitor could not hide his astonishment anymore.

He told the shepherd: "I am surprised at your way of answering my questions.

To all my questions you wish to answer separately for the white and black sheep.

But your answers are all the same.

Let me ask a final question.

Do the white and black sheep really differ in any way?"

"Of course, they are different; the white sheep belong to me" answered the shepherd.

"What about the black sheep?", came the question automatically from the mouth of the visitor.

"They also belong to me", answered the shepherd.

It may look like a puzzling story!

But it reflects a common response towards human diversity.

We encounter people with different colors, dressed differently, speaking foreign languages, belonging to different religions and following different customs and traditions. We are naturally prone to prejudice based on these diversities. The shepherd in the story mimics this common attitude. However, he could not hide the fact the elements that are common in his sheep was overwhelming than their apparent differences.

By now we have scientific evidences that the human diversity is merely external. But in the history and even today the human diversity was used to stratify society and to discriminate the individuals and groups. Sciences, philosophies and even theologies were constructed to support human discrimination. There were, for example, theological discussions in history whether a black-colored human body can support a human soul. The powerful in the society cunningly used the diversity as a reason for discrimination.

After creating the universe, the Bible reports the first reaction of the creator:” Every thing is good”. Looking at the diversity of creation he might also have said: “Everything is beautiful”. The diversity of creation manifests the inexhaustible creativity of God, the creator. It is meant to be eternal source of joy for human beings, making him ever inquisitive.

But in the history the human diversity is found tastelessly exploited. The diversity is ever since used to instigate fear, whether in the name of terrorism or globalization. The conformity became a virtue and diversity a sin. God would surely regret for creating human being so diverse!

Jesus, the Son of God was also not exempt from discrimination based on diversity. We find him in the gospel reading today, preaching the Good News in his home city. His listeners marveled at the authority with which he spoke. They considered him a prophet, who speaks in the words of God.

But the excitement was short-lived. Soon emerged the discussions about his person! Who is he? A carpenter! What is his educational status? An illiterate without any formal education! What about his family? His parents and relatives are all but ordinary people! So they rejected him. They closed their ears to the Good News!

We find Jesus struggling to cope with the situation. He could not be at his best. He could not heal many of them. He experienced a low!

The Son of God partakes in the experience millions in the human history, before and after him, who were marginalized in terms of color, caste, class, creed, language, ethnicity, nationality, age and sex or in other words, on the basis of human diversity.

He realized how deeply the divine plan is shattered!

The diversity which God has imparted to the creation in view of inexhaustible joy of the humankind turns out to be a curse to many!

The Good News he preaches is therefore an antidote to the tasteless exploitation of human diversity.

According to his Good News the humanity is but God's own family in the world!

God is "our father" for all, irrespective of the diversity they bear.

The Son of God invites us back to the celebration of diversity, as in a family!

Based on the following reasons, I dare to call the football world cup as a spiritual event of the modern times!

It is an event with explicit motto to remove the racism from the football field!

Here gather nations, people belonging to different ethnic groups, religion and languages.

They celebrate together even in the face of inevitable failure of some of their beloved teams.

They shed their personal and collective pessimism and grow in good spirit.

I do not forget some stray event of tasteless aggression lack of creativity in the game.

But in general it has turned out to be a real celebration of diversity and in tune with the gospel dreams.

So let us be happy and continue our celebration of this divine meal.

It is the celebration of human diversity extending over three millennia.

It reminds of the presence of our Savior among us!

A presence that invites us to celebrate as in a family!

Amen