

*Don't try to combine faith in the glorified Lord with the making of distinctions between classes of people. This principle deserves our thoughtful reflection today.*

I know a chap who was born in North Yorkshire, who studied in America, and married a girl from Florida, and lives in Strasbourg. Last year they adopted a little girl called Julia from an orphanage in mainland China. Julia was nearly two, but had never learned to play, and had no toys of her own. She had lived in a high-sided cot for most of the day, and each baby was allowed to borrow a single toy each day, which remained tied to the wall, and was abstracted in the evening. Although she knew some Chinese words, she had never developed her speech, because no-one used to speak to her. Since coming to live in Strasbourg, Julia has been on a steep learning curve, and she is flourishing and creative and very beautiful.

I'm telling this story on Racial Justice Sunday, because it illustrates what can happen when people use a little imagination. It's a story about a particular sort of love, and that gives it its interest for us; our Church is first and last a school of love, and our job is to give people reasons to love, and ideas about love, and (because God is Love) faith in love. And because love is vulnerable in many ways, we have to point out the enemies of love and move to defeat them and put them to flight.

Catholics are uniquely-placed to attack one of the oldest enemies of love: racism. In the first century the Catholic Church took the momentous step described in the Acts of the Apostles, when it was decided - the text says: *by us and by the Holy Spirit* - not to make Jewishness and obedience to Jewish tradition an obligation on new Christians. In doing that, people like Paul and Barnabas won a victory which reverberates through history; they proclaimed that Christ was a Saviour for all nations and all peoples, and that his taking royal power over all of them would cancel the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, barbarian and Roman, man and woman. That was the moment when we stopped being a Jewish Sect and became the Catholic Church. Still to this day the Church is the great world religion, calling on all peoples and cultures to find their home in her. There are Catholics of every race and nation, there are cardinals and bishops of every colour and language. The Pope is an Italian, or a Pole, or a German, and will certainly be a South American or an African quite soon. We are never a national Church, and our responsibility is shared for the mission to all the world; that is why we support missionaries and poor churches, and why they pray for us and share what they have with us. England and Wales already has vast numbers of priests from abroad; it was never thought strange that an Irish priest should minister to an English congregation, and until recently we had a Bishop from Ireland.

So there is nothing trendy or free-thinking about our attitude to foreign people and people from other cultures. Our religion isn't home-grown; it is from a different continent. Jesus was Asian, and the foundations of Christianity are Jewish to the core. If we have built those elements into the culture of Britain, we have set multiculturalism in stone; Lincoln Cathedral is a mediaeval Temple to an Asian Saviour. So when you hear reports of resurgent anti-Semitism, let your alarm-bells ring. When you hear people calling for Britain for the British, and perpetuating hatred and fear for immigrants, and spreading appalling lies about decent Muslim families, don't be indifferent and let it pass. We must insist on the same generous openness which St Paul extended towards us, which enabled us to transcend racial separation and be welcomed into the one body of Christ. It is that glorious destiny that is under threat when people allow the voices of prejudice and fear to speak in them. We shall never enter the Kingdom of Heaven until we are prepared to go in together. So let us understand the miracle in the Gospel today, worked in the Greek cities of Galilee, where Jesus allowed a man imprisoned in deafness and dumbness the power to welcome the sound of other voices, and the power to respond with his own. If we can detect the mistrust and negativity in ourselves, let us pray to hear the word of Jesus: *Ephphatha - be opened!*