

Pentecost 18, Proper 23  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

October 12, 2014  
Rev. Paul Moore

## Mestizaje

At 2:00 a.m. on this day, October 12th, 522 years ago an Italian navigator landed on an island in what would come to be known as the Bahamas. He claimed the land for his patrons and protectors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel of Spain. He called himself in his journals, "the Admiral," and his name was Christopher Columbus. With this landing the first permanent contact between Europe and the Americas began. In 983 Erik the Red took Vikings to what is now Newfoundland. St. Brendan, an Irish monk and explorer is reported to have sailed west from Ireland in search of the Promised Land in the 5th century, 500 years before Erik. He reports finding a land to the west. Columbus used his writings in his calculations. But none of them lasted. Columbus's move is significant in the magnitude of its effect.

The Taino people who received him were friendly and generous, though they had no clue what Columbus was up to, or why he had come. What they learned in time is the hard lesson that all the peoples of the western hemisphere learned. Europeans came because they were after something, and that quest, be it noble or otherwise, has shaped the history of these western lands to this day.

One of the things that the ensuing waves of Spaniards sought were livings. They requested grants of land from the King. Then they replicated, as best they could, the nobility of Spain. They were often second and third sons of noblemen, who had no inheritance in the Motherland. And so when they arrived they took not only land, but wives. From their unions sprang a new race of people. Today we call them "Mestizo," mixed-blood, part European, part Native American, and completely New World.

On December 9, 1531, just 39 years later, a pious Indian man, Juan Diego was going to mass at dawn when he heard beautiful music on top of a desert hill just outside the city of Mexico. The story goes that he climbed to the top of the hill. There the Virgin Mary appeared to him. She, too, was Mestizo. She had dark skin, and she spoke to him in his native Nahuatl, and not Spanish. The Christian faith discovered a "mestizo" expression. The Virgin of Guadalupe represents among many things, a certain "mestizaje" of religion and culture.

But the concept of "Mestizaje" is wider than just a racial reference to the descendants of the Spanish immigrants of the 16th century. In 1066 William the Conqueror invaded England. For the next 300 years England was a province of the Frankish empire. French

became the language of the higher classes, education and government. Most of the lower classes all spoke various dialects of the Celtic languages. Some spoke a Germanic language called "Angle." Some historians called the people Angles, other called them Saxons. We call them Anglo-Saxons. French culture became the ideal of the lower classes. With the years French and Angle began to borrow heavily from one another. From the merging a third language emerged that is now spoken world-wide. We call it "English."

The English people themselves are something of a mixed lot. The mosaic of small Celtic and Germanic kingdoms that occupied the Island has amalgamated into something of a whole. We can accurately refer to "the English," now, whereas even 500 years ago it would have only referred to those people who lived in the center of the Island up to the north-eastern coast.

And the same tale can be told of invasions, migrations and amalgamations of people around the world throughout the history of humanity. There even seems to be some evidence that modern humans are a hybrid between the ancient Neanderthals of Europe and Humans that emerged from Africa. The tale of our species is a tale of the mixing of bloods.

Science tells us that this mixing is a good thing. Hybrid vigor makes mules more useful than horses. Too narrow a gene pool leads to problems. (Ancient royal families often intermarried too closely and were often plagued by dim-witted or malformed children.) Isolation without diversification is a dead-end street.

Apparently God thinks mixing is a good idea as well. In creation there are many different kinds of beings: mineral, plant, animal, and some crazy, in-between forms like Euglena and Paramecia. Just within the human species there are many different kinds of peoples. And why not? One could say that the very Godhead is a mixture, a kind of cosmic Mestizaje. Father, Son and Holy Spirit share an essential unity, as the ground of all being, but it is in their distinctions within that unity that they celebrate community—and it is into that community that we are invited. That invitation comes through another sort of mixing, for when we became alienated through our sin God came in the form of the Son, the expressive one, the Word, to be one of us. Jesus was God and human—the perfect Mestizo.

So what does that mean to us today? In the Gospel lesson today Jesus tells a parable of a wedding feast. Every time you get Jesus and a wedding feast you can almost see the little bubble over his head, and in it the magnificent scene of that day in heaven when all things are set right, and we all sit at the table of the wedding banquet of the Lamb. So it's

worth paying special attention to. In this one a king gives such a banquet. He invites all the important people, who all have even more important excuses. In putting their concerns over this event they choose alienation from their King—and so the king sends out into the streets. If the "worthy" people will not come, then the "unworthy" will come in their place. It is unspoken in the story that the king's servants give each guest a wedding garment. One is found, however, without a wedding garment. He has not come in with a servant, but on his own. He has not surrendered to the grace of the King, but chosen his own way. He is as alienated from the King as the "worthy" and he is thrown out.

What makes one "worthy," then? It is the humble acceptance of the invitation given to all—nothing more and nothing less. God has extended to all of creation an invitation to come back into loving relationship with God. The divine community reaches out to all of creation, for that is its nature. We are all creations of God who have become alienated from God, and are invited back into relationship with God. This is our common ground.

But is it the basis of our interactions with one another? Are our relationships based on the humble acceptance of the invitation to be with one another, or do they more often than not fall along the lines of our "in-group" vs. those who are "outsiders?"

They say that 11:00 on Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour in American society. Does the church find more identity in how we are alike, or in the simple and humble acceptance of God's invitation to community? In other words, do we welcome as we have been welcomed?

Do we choose friends that all look just like us, or do we cut across the spectrum of our society, ignoring, as God would, our little artificial divisions, and finding others who, like us, humbly seek to be in relationship with God and one another?

Do we treat creation as another part of God's great act of creating? Do we hear the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, who shows us clearly that the setting right of all of creation is caught up in our own redemption? Can we find community beyond the strictly human family?

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in an address to the Daughters of the American Revolution on April 21, 1938 said, "Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants..." Every one of us is Mestizo, and in that we have a glorious divine gift, for in Christ God himself is Mestizo with us, and calls us into a goodly fellowship of mixing!