

HOMILY — Fifth Sunday of Easter, 2018
by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS

This past Wednesday I went to Chicago to spend time with someone I've been friends with for nearly 60 years. I want to tell you about three things that were part of that trip. For me, they help fill out something of the meaning of today's readings.

My friend's name is Charles Amato. People call him either Chuck or Charlie. He's part of a large family that has its roots in Norwalk Ohio. He was the nephew of Sister Trudy Baltes, an IHM who died quite a few years ago. I first met Chuck at a boys camp owned by my religious community in the Irish Hills, about 50 miles west of here. Chuck was an exceptional student and athlete in both high school and college. He eventually became an attorney and practiced poverty law in Louisiana.

In 1982, Chuck had a massive cerebral hemorrhage that left him totally paralyzed on the right side of his body. The stroke also left him with a condition called aphasia. He's able to speak only a few words.

Chuck has been living in Chicago for many years with the help of his family and a series of caregivers. He is one the the bravest people I know. This brings me to the three things that I want to relate to today's readings.

Because I hate driving in Chicago traffic, I take what's called the Megabus a couple times a year to visit Chuck. Yesterday, on the way home, the bus was very crowded. with a whole variety of people, some of whom were speaking languages I didn't understand.

When I got home and reflected on the trip, I was struck by the fact that here was this mass of humanity. peacefully on a journey together. It becomes for me a kind of metaphor for what Jesus says in the Gospel. We are all among the branches of this vine of humanity We call it the body of Christ.

The caregiver who has been with Chuck for the past couple of years is a man named Serge who is from Cameroon in West Africa. Serge is studying to be a pharmacist at Northwestern University near where Chuck lives. Despite a full load of studies, Serge is incredibly attentive to Chuck. Chuck is pretty independent but also has some very demanding needs.

Friday evening, Serge went to an end-of-the-school-year party at the university. He went dressed in festive clothing native to Cameroon.

**He brought back cell phone photos of people dressed in clothing
from dozens of different countries all over the globe.**

**It occurred to me that, despite all of anti-immigrant talk
in our country these days, here were Americans and "foreigners"
having a great party together.**

**I can't help but think of words from today's second reading:
"Children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."**

**Both going to and returning from Chicago I had the opportunity
to read part of a book
by Rev. Greg Boyle called *Barking to the Choir*.**

It's a book of some hilarious humor and profound Christian insight.

**For those who may not know, Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest
who began, and now oversees, in Los Angeles what has become
the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program
on the planet.**

**The book is a description of how Boyle takes
hoodlums from the streets of Los Angeles
and introduces them to what Jesus says about the vine and the branches.**

That introducing is both in word and action.

**Boyle talks constantly about this radical kinship we have with one another
and with the God who assures us all we are loved, without condition.**

Jesus says today, "I have called you friends. . . .

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you."

In a short time we will be invited to join in a procession.

It's much more than getting in line to receive communion.

It's a reminder that we're on this life-long journey together.

**We process forward, forward
so that we might do what Jesus asks of us in today's Gospel
"Remain in me, and I in you . . . like a vine and its branches."**

**The intimacy Jesus describes in today's Gospel is astonishing.
It should nearly take our breath away.**

**In the eight verses we heard from John's Gospel today,
the evangelist uses that word "REMAIN" eight times.**

There is an intimacy implied in Jesus' words that is remarkable.

**If we open ourselves to the embrace of Jesus
and reach out to others with that same love,
we remain in him and he in us.**

**He urges us to eat this bread
and, yes, drink from this cup . . .
to drink into ourselves the dying of Christ, so we ALL might live.**

May God do in us all what God did in Saul as he became Paul.

Read Before the Communion Procession

**Let no one, conscious of
her/his sinfulness, withdraw from our common celebration, nor let anyone be
kept away from our public prayer by the burden of guilt. Sinner indeed, that
person must not despair of pardon on this day which is so highly privileged; for if
a thief could receive the grace of paradise, how could a Christian be refused
forgiveness?**

**St. Maximus of Turin
5th century**