Under One Roof

Into Your Hands | *Archbishop Robert G. Casey*

"Lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of your mercy."

The Fatima prayer, a well-known Catholic prayer recited while praying the Rosary, reminds us that Jesus seeks to gather all of us under heaven's roof. When we consider Christ yesterday, today, and forever, that adds up to a lot of souls. We will be gathered under one large roof!

In Matthew's Gospel, a Roman centurion remarks to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8). The centurion's words have become our words at Mass as we prepare to come forward in procession to share in Holy Communion. The journey down the aisle becomes a foretaste of our journey to heaven, giving us a glimpse into the future that awaits us. What a magnificent moment awaits us, when all God's creation finds itself assembled under one roof and united in eternal worship of our Creator!

I was recently reminded of my childhood days when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus would stop in my city while traveling across America, inviting people far and wide to share a moment of childlike joy with friends and family under the roof of the big top. Posters would appear; billboards would announce, "Come one, come all!"

Quite like a circus, our Church seeks to construct a "big tent" that can welcome all and unite God's children in the joy of the Gospel. We are called to create a Church with a roof large enough to accommodate many people; it is not only a select few or simply some lucky people who can find a seat. All are invited to gather.

Gathering many people together does have its tensions. As each of us tries to find our place and take a seat, there can be friction, arguments, and disagreements. When we call something a "three-ring-circus," this can suggest a chaotic, loud, and messy situation where too many things happen at the same time. However, that three-ring-circus also allows all those gathered to be engaged and participating. Under one roof does not suggest one size fits all. The three rings at a circus remind us that there must be room for diversity and an allowance for different gifts but the same Spirit.

Our life here on earth should help shape and form us for the eternal home that awaits us. Are we worthy of that heavenly home? Most days we are not; we must rely on the mercy of God. Are we prepared to stand under the same roof with all the souls Jesus is leading there? Most days we are not; we must rely on the grace of God. Yet, ready or not, Jesus continues to call out to the world in the words of the circus ringmaster, "Come one, come all!" We must heed the call of our Savior and make the journey to heaven.

On our journey we put into practice the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited" (Is 54:2-3).

Guide us, Lord, along the everlasting way. Encourage us in our invitation to one and all. May all of creation come to find its fulfillment under the roof of the heavenly banquet that awaits us.