

On Thursday, I was privileged to lead a memorial service for a 94-year-old German American, who came to the United States as the bride of an American serviceman at the end of World War II. I was struck by the story about her having been rejected when she arrived, by her American mother-in-law, and by others in the community because she was German at a time when American negativity toward Germans was high. She was exiled to her room by her mother-in-law, receiving no help in learning English or in adjusting to her new life – with a new husband, in a land very distant from where she grew up. Out of love, she took a leap of faith to come all this way to be with a man she loved; she must have felt the rejection of his family keenly.

We still see rejection today. Not too long ago, when living near Washington DC, I remember doing the networking circuit with a very articulate and attractive friend of mine who was French, only to have her shunned because the French hadn't joined with us in the second Persian Gulf war. That was the same time when we'd been urged to call those potatoes we have at fish fry "Freedom fries" rather than French fries, because, by the tenet of that time, France, and by extension all French people, were bad because they disagreed with us.

One of my acquaintances began to discern call to the priesthood, away from a career in business, because he attended the funeral of a colleague who had died of AIDS,

only to discover that no one else was at that funeral – just him and the minister. He was overcome with compassion for this young man, who was rejected because he was sick with what was considered then to be an untouchable disease.

Many of us have seen and experienced rejection similar to the folks in these stories and similar to that felt by Ishmael and Hagar. According to the customs in Old Testament times, childless women would give their maids to their husbands and, any children born out of that union, would be considered theirs. Sarah and Abraham had gotten impatient waiting for God to fulfill the promise through them and Sarah was old, so they had used this custom. Until Isaac came along, Ishmael was the heir to everything of Abraham's and he had been close to his father. He must have felt the rejection of being sent away keenly.

Perhaps, some of us either knowingly or unknowingly, have played a part in rejecting others, as Sarah, and Abraham, great matriarchs and patriarchs of our faith did. Rejection – to reject and to be rejected – is part of the human condition. The good news is that God's grace is sufficient for both the rejected and the rejector.

As we see in the story of Hagar and Ishmael, God comes to the aid of the rejected. When Hagar thought her son would certainly die in the hot and dry desert, God gave her hope and enabled her to find water and food. He was with

the young man as he learned the skills needed to survive – hunting with a bow – and as he found a wife. And God kept his promise to the boy – he made a great nation from his descendants – while also keeping his promise to Abraham, Sarah and their son, Isaac to make a great nation from which salvation would come. So whether rejector or rejectee, God's grace provides. God keeps his promise to us to provide for all our needs – the physical needs, the need to feel love, the need for salvation and hope.

The lessons for us as compassionate disciples of Christ are to be aware of what prejudices or jealousies may be inside us so that we can continue to love all people in Christ's name. We stay close to Christ and we pray and God helps us not to reject anyone just because a particular race or particular type of person is out of fashion or because their presence is inconvenient to our own goals. As we stay in Christ, we gain fruits of the spirit which enable us to view all people with compassion, rather than with feelings of jealousy or hatred. At those times when we fail to love everyone, however, we know that God's grace is still there for us. God will keep his covenant with us, even when we fail.

When we find ourselves rejected, in small ways or large, we remember that Jesus loves us always – completely and unconditionally. God's love is perfect. We can find

love and comfort in Him always.

God provided my French friend with a sense of humor so that she survived her stay in America. And, of course, those of us who knew her never rejected her as a friend – this was God working through us. For her the worst is over. At least now we're happy enough with the French to say French fries again.

For the young man who died of AIDS, I believe God provided a big welcome in heaven. The young man transitioned from the pain of disease and rejection on earth to an eternity of love and light. And out of that situation, God brought one thing good. God brought a transformed life – that of my acquaintance and colleague – whose life changed, who was formed into a priest.

The young German woman survived too. God gave her an incredible strength that helped her and inspired those around her. And she found great love from future generations who weren't so damaged by World War II.

God is always faithful and God accepts everyone. Jesus died for all people. As Christians, we are called to model this love and acceptance of everyone. If we are rejected, Christ is there and Christ will provide what we need. If we sin and reject others, Christ is there too, providing

forgiveness and continuing in His promises to us.

Amen