

(Many of these ideas are from DYNAMIC PREACHING, XXV, 3, pp. 15-17) Twenty-two years ago, at the Brandenburg Gate right in front of the Berlin Wall, Ronald Reagan gave his famous speech. "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

The most famous wall has to be the Great Wall of China, begun 500 years before Christ, built and rebuilt over 1100 years. Between 2 and 3 million peasants died constructing it. At its peak, a million soldiers guarded it. I'm sure the wall afforded some protection, but it also expressed a dark side of the Chinese temperament. Scholars say as recently as 1820, China accounted for 33% of the world's Gross Domestic Product. Barely 100 years later, the tables had turned and China produced only 9% of the world's wealth. What produced this mammoth eclipse of China, which had been a major power for thousands of years? China walled itself off from the rest of the world and missed the industrial revolution, that made the US and Europe rich and powerful. They are only now catching up.

Most walls seem like great ideas when we build them. They increase our sense of security, control, perhaps superiority. But they can constrict, they can keep life out.

In the second reading, St. Paul mentions a wall --- the wall of racial pride and exclusivity that the Jews had built around themselves. "We're the chosen people, the clean ones ... and everyone else isn't. Keep back." This walled up mentality found a very concrete physical expression. A stone wall of separation, 3 or 4 feet high, ran right through the court of the temple, and inside was for Jews only. In fact in 1871 archaeologists found a stone from the wall with this warning: "No man of another race is to proceed within the partition and enclosing wall about the sanctuary. Any one arrested there will have himself to blame for the penalty of death which will be imposed as a consequence."

And the attitude of Jesus the Good Shepherd towards this wall, or walls in general. We heard today. Jesus is peace, and he has come to make all one, and he is intent to break down the dividing wall of enmity, through his own flesh. He is even willing to abolish the law, if it makes people proud and unable to enter into union with others. He tears down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, and the wall between all of us and God, through his own blood. He asks us to enter into him, into his flesh which is the church, and learn new ways. Ways without walls, creating in himself one person instead of many.

Are you able to imagine living without walls? Are you willing to declare stupid and outdated, since Jesus, walls between gays people and straights, liberals and conservatives, good citizens and felons, red gangs and blues, Anglos and Latinos, rich and poor, Catholics and non-Catholics ... and maybe even between sinners and saints? Are you committed to make your mercy, your love, your positive regard ... universal ... catholic?

Jesus, when we live inside you, and think inside you ... we stop feeling scattered, alienated, superior ... or inferior --- that's the work of bad shepherds --- and start imagining a whole new world ... one where peace is preached and given to people who are near us and people who couldn't be father away. This new world feels strange to us, even threatening. But you tell us heaven is closes, and we should start living the new life now. Help us find such security in you we can start imagine a world without walls.