

St. Lukes / New Orleans

Gaudet Evensong / May 26th 2026, 5pm

The Rev. Guimond Pierre-Louis

Let us pray: Lord, we stumble, we drift, and we don't always know the way. Yet we trust in your never-failing mercy and love. With your shepherd's staff, guide us and lead us. Amen.

I would like to say thank you to our Bishop, Shannon, to the people of Historic St. Luke's and their Rector, Mother Jane-Allison, and to the faithful stewards of the Gaudet Fund for the invitation to share God's word with you on this glorious Evensong as we continue to give thanks for the life and ministry of Blessed Frances Joseph-Gaudet.

Last week, I was leading an adult formation class at Christ Church Covington, where I serve as Associate Rector. For that series, we used a program put together by the Episcopal Church called *Centered*, a Christian discipleship experience. It is made of short videos and table conversations. The session we used last week was titled, "Loving Neighbors and Strangers Like Jesus Does." And in the round-table discussion, someone asked: Who is the stranger?

A woman around the table said, "There are no strangers in God's Kingdom. We're all part of God's blended family. So, anybody who looks like a human being is my sibling, and I'm going to respond to them that way. I'm going to smile, let my eyes twinkle, and say, 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon.'

She continues, "I don't know why, we humans, don't really understand that. We create artificial lines of division, you're part of us, you're not; you belong, you don't. And yet, all of us are children of God."

I've been thinking about that all week. And I think that's exactly what Frances Joseph-Gaudet understood, not only in what she did, but in how she saw people and the world. She saw the world as full of siblings. She saw the incarcerated person, the young man no one believed in, the prisoner no one visited, and she saw family. She saw friends. She saw God's beloved. What a beautiful and timeless legacy!

She said, "I could not rest while any child of God suffered alone." With her life, she challenged the systems, the normal view of things. But she did it in the simplest, most human way possible: She practiced friendship. I imagined a simple thing she probably did was that she remembered the name of a prisoner who thought they were only a number. No, you are not a number, you are my sibling.

Saying that we are siblings is not so foreign as it sounds. Remember that every time we meet as Christians, either for the Eucharist or for morning prayer or evening prayer, we say the Lord's Prayer: Our Father. Not just my father or your father, but our father. But the readings this evening give us another image that is the same thing as the "our Father". We heard that God is a Shepherd. A Shepherd who knows us by name. A Shepherd who calls us friend.

Jesus says, "I am the gate and I am the good shepherd". There is one flock, one shepherd.

The reading from Acts tells us what happens when people actually live like one. When they treat each other as siblings, when they share what they have, when they break bread together, when they pray together, and refuse to let anyone be a stranger. "There was not a needy person among them." Not because they were wealthy, but because they were family and friends. I think that's what we are trying to do with the Gaudet Fund, to support, uplift and encourage others as the first disciples did.

Frances Joseph-Gaudet lived that kind of gospel in the streets of New Orleans, in the prisons and the juvenile courts. She became, “a friend to the friendless.”

When I think about Frances Joseph-Gaudet, I think about someone who break the artificial line that society has made us think are important or even indispensable. She didn't wait for the system to change. She simply lived as though every person she met was a member of God's family.

Yes, there are no strangers in God's Kingdom. We are all related in one way or another, not necessarily by blood, culture, or geography, but by the breath of God that is in all of us, as we see in Genesis. The question we have to ask ourselves is: Do we have to wait for heaven before we start seeing each other as siblings? Some people might say yes. Some might say, “Well, that's just the way the world is.” But Frances Joseph-Gaudet said no. And we can say no.

As I was growing up in Haiti, we learned early that being who we are means learning to say no, no to oppressive systems, no to artificial lines that pull us apart, no to the forces that tell us we are less or separate from one another. We learned to say no so that we could say yes, yes to dignity of every human being, to community, yes to God who made us one people. If we can say no to the things that divide us, then we can say yes to building a society where God's people live together as one. Not the same, because God never asked us to be the same, but one. Doing that one friendship at a time.

But what happens when we are the ones being treated as the strangers? When someone looks at us and decides we don't belong? For that, we have Jesus as the perfect example. The Good Shepherd knows what it is to be rejected, overlooked, and misunderstood. And Frances Joseph-Gaudet knew that too. She knew what it felt like to be dismissed by society, and she still chose to live as a friend to the friendless. When

we are treated as strangers, we are invited to respond with love. A love that sees beyond what our society gives us.

And that is the invitation for us tonight. To look at our city, our neighborhoods, our schools, our prisons, our streets, and say: “There are no strangers in God’s Kingdom.” To look at the person who doesn’t look like us, vote like us, worship like us, or speak like us, like me with my accent and say: “You are my sibling.” And I will answer with my whole heart too, “you are my sibling”. To look at the child who is lost, the elder who is lonely, the neighbor who is struggling, and say: “I am here for you.” To look at those in need of education and support, as we are doing with the Gaudet fund and said, I am here for you.

Because that is what Jesus does. That is what the Good Shepherd does. And that’s what we are called to do.

As we leave this place, may we carry with us the truth that there are no strangers in God’s Kingdom. May the Good Shepherd guide us so that our lives, like Frances Joseph Gaudet, become good news to someone who needs a friend. And may God give us grace to live as one flock, one family, one people.

AMEN.