

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 16 August 2020

Scriptures: Isaiah 56:1,6-7; Rom.11:13-15,29-32; Matt.15:21-28

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading, Isaiah highlights God's recognition of the foreigners among the Israelites who observe the covenant. All nations will be blessed by God.

In the second reading, St. Paul expresses hope that Gentiles, as well as Jews, will enjoy the mercy of God.

In the Gospel, we have the story of the Canaanite woman whom Jesus praises as a person of "great faith".

In our own days, today, of deplorable levels of social and economic inequality, with ethnic and racial strife, it is worthwhile to look more closely at our Gospel reading.

The belief that God's blessings are limited to people of certain nationalities or cultures, such as white privilege, has been around for a very long time. Such a belief was very much alive in the society in which Jesus grew up. What is not clear is whether he really believed it himself or whether he wanted to expose it and correct its false claims.

Every people and every culture has a handful of such prejudices and myths—from the myth that only one particular race or nation can possibly be loved by God, to the myth that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church; from the myth of the superiority of men over women, to the myth of the superiority of Western cultures.

Today's Gospel invites us to expose such myths and correct their false and exaggerated claims.

In the Gospel, the first thing the Canaanite woman teaches us, in our Christian vocation to reconcile all humankind to God, is

courage. Her audacity and her refusal to take “no” for an answer finally paid off. We need to remember this in our own work for the common good of all people.

We can have the courage not to be afraid to challenge prejudice and elitism. God can use us to bring justice and healing to all of God’s disadvantaged daughters and sons all over the world.

The second thing we can learn from this woman is the power of persuasion and dialogue. When Jesus spoke to her in language that demeaned her people, she did not retaliate in anger but kept her eyes on the goal of her mission, which was to show that even non-Jews are entitled to God’s blessing in Christ. Her gentle retort forced Jesus to rethink his response to her request. She is a model of non-violence. Jesus praised her, saying, “Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted”. And, it was. Her daughter was healed immediately.

The Canaanite woman was not focused on herself. Her love was for her daughter. Her faith led her to Jesus. By her faith and by her actions she clearly was rejecting a culture of individuality.

A few days ago, Pope Francis, speaking at his Wednesday audience, called on the faithful to “overcome our personal and collective individualism” especially during this time of the coronavirus pandemic, “which hit us all indiscriminately”.

Pope Francis said “the pandemic has revealed how vulnerable and interconnected we all are, while also making us more aware of the spread within our societies of a false, individualistic way of thinking, one that rejects human dignity and relationships, views persons as consumer goods, and creates a ‘throw-away’ culture”.

The Canaanite woman genuinely inspires us to be a welcoming people and a people of true courage.