

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 20, 2017 – Good Shepherd Church

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Thus says the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants—all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant, them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Psalm: Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

R. (4) O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Scripture Reading: Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus' disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Sunday's Gospel can give a headache to preachers and to regular Catholics both. Jesus refuses to heal a woman because she is, in his metaphor, one of the "dogs." Whaaaaat? You know the story. The woman cries out for help, and Jesus will not even talk to her. The disciples demand that he tell her to go away because she is a trouble-maker. And he seems to agree with them. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he says. She is from Canaan, not from Israel. Finally the poor woman walks right up, does "homage" to Jesus and says, "Lord, help me!" Jesus would never ignore such words, at least so we Christians and Catholics believe. Nor should we ever be deaf to words like this in our own daily lives. But no. He says, "It is not right to take the food of the children [Israel] and throw it to the dogs [Canaan]." Ouch. This is the line that is so hard for us to understand, so un-Jesus-like. There are clues. She called out to him first with the words "Son of David," a term hallowed by use in the ancient Hebrew scriptures, always referring to the Messiah. She is a Canaanite, who did not believe in any Messiah-to-come, especially not one that would descend from David. Yet, against her whole background, this woman seems to have belief in Jesus as Messiah. She calls him "Lord." In Matthew's Gospel this is an explicit admission that Jesus and God are one. Going just on her language, we have a definite indication that she believed in him as the Savior. Surely he sensed this.

But Israel and the Canaanites had long been in strife. Israelites would think, how could "they" with their strange gods produce a woman who believes in the one God and in Jesus as the Christ? They couldn't. But maybe Jesus was drawing her out, teasing her, in order to strengthen her belief. Perhaps he was quoting the word "dogs" as a reference to names the two peoples actually called each other. Something like this: "My people of Israel believe in the one God and your people do not. How can I give their food to you 'dogs,' as we call you?" The woman's quick wit provides a wonderful, humble, bantering response, that wins the day. "Even dogs eat scraps that fall from their master's table." It is a riposte, a parry, a counter-thrust, and Jesus loves it. She is saying, "It does not matter what a person's status is as long as they believe. And I do believe." I'll bet Jesus smiled a great smile as he told her how great her faith was. Maybe he laughed at her fast repartee. And of course he gladly gave her what she asked; he cured her daughter. Doesn't Christ's Holy Spirit smile within you when you ask for what you need? When you let nothing stand in the way, like your own origins, your status in life, your sins, and maybe even your rejection (or acceptance) by others? At Communion time, let us hold out our hands and say inwardly, "Son of David, have pity on me." This is a paraphrase of the Canaanite woman. Out loud, our response is "Amen," which means "I do believe." Let us mean it this Sunday.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Do you spend a lot of your time with folks who are "joyful in God's house of prayer"? Are you joyful too? How do you "observe what is right," and "do what is just"?
2. "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." According to St. Paul's statement, will God ever have a change of mind and stop loving us? "Even if we are faithless he is faithful, because he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Explain.
3. What is it about her statement, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters," that prompts Jesus to grant her request? Do you think Jesus might have understood his mission from his Father better, during this conversation?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen