

Homily of Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2023

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Psalm 67:2-8; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28

The first reading took place when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity and rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem. Through Prophet Isaiah, God commanded the Israelites, "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 fast to my covenant; them I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." By this command, God communicated to the Israelites the universality of salvation and his rejection of the discrimination against the Gentiles.

In the second reading, St. Paul, although a Jew, was an apostle to the Gentiles. In Galatians 3:28, St. Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Salvation is not a prerogative to any special group of people, but for all peoples.

In the gospel, the Canaanite woman did not mind the enmity between the Canaanites and the Jews and the disparage of the Canaanites by the Jews. She made her way to see Jesus to present her case. Her daughter was tormented by a demon. Jesus did not say a word when the woman prayed to him. Although Jesus tested the woman's faith, more importantly, Jesus wanted his encounter with the woman to be a teaching moment for his disciples and the Jews. The disciples reacted, "Send her away, for she is calling after us." Jesus responded by repeating two Jewish despising sayings against the Gentiles. "I was sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and "It is not right to take the food for children and throw it to the dogs." By these statements, Jesus reechoed the age-old Jewish belief that the Messiah was going to come to save only the Jews and the demeaning of the Gentiles as dogs by the Jews. For the Jews, the Gentiles were unclean. They neither knew nor kept the law.

Jesus' statements did not discourage the woman. Rather, she persisted. She "did Jesus homage, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" "She said, 'Please Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their master.'" Jesus was amazed and exclaimed, "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. By attending to the woman, Jesus cancelled the erroneous Jewish belief that salvation is only for the Jews.

Importantly, the gospel's narrative maintains the theme of the first reading and second reading, that God is the creator and father of all, and that Jesus came to save the whole world. Jesus came to break down dividing walls of enmity between races and destroy hostility of separation (Ephesians 2:14).

The Canaanite woman has a few lessons to teach us. The first is her unwavering faith in Jesus, although she was a non-Jew. She believed that Jesus would heal her daughter. Nothing could discourage her. The second is that she persisted in her prayer. She did

not stop until her prayer was granted. The third is that she was not deterred by what people thought of or said about her. She remained focused on her goal. The fourth is that she displayed great humility.

The disciples said to Jesus, "Send her away, for she is calling out after us." We hear this same kind of hate speech against fellow human beings: "Send them away, they don't look like us." "Send them away. They don't speak like us." "Send them away. Their religion is different." "Send them away. They are taking our jobs." "Send them away. They don't belong to our party." "Send them away. They will overtake us." "Send them away. They don't reason like us." "Send them away. They don't agree with us." "Send them away. They don't support us." "Send them away ...". Sadly, this kind of hate has led to all kinds of discrimination, persecution, expulsion, xenophobia, killing, and so on. We pray for the change of heart of the perpetrators of these evils.

Is there someone calling after us for help whom we have neglected or dismissed? Is there someone we disrespect or disdain because he or she is different, or because he or she does not belong to us? Is there someone we want to be sent away or be displaced because we are envious or jealous, or we just do not like the person?

When St. Paul says that Jesus came to destroy hostility of separation (Ephesians 2:14), St. Paul also means that Jesus came to destroy the hostility that separates us from God. St. Paul writes, "For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other" (Galatians 4:17). Let us invite Jesus to come into our life and destroy the desires of the flesh that separate us from God. May Jesus also destroy all enemy weapons channeled against us. Amen.

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