

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 20, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *God of all creation, in your Word today you tell us that all people are invited to your house of worship. With you there are no outsiders. Open our hearts to a spirit of hospitality to all people of good will. Breathe your Holy Spirit upon us as we gather to share life and your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: We live in a world and, unfortunately, in a Church where some are regarded as ‘insiders’ and others as ‘outsiders.’ All three readings today remind us of the *universality* and *inclusiveness* of God’s love—all are invited to sit at God’s table.

If you had not read the commentary prior to your meeting, consider doing so before or after each Scripture reading.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

God loves all people and not just his chosen people. As Isaiah writes these words during the post-exilic period of Israel’s history, there are lots of foreigners living in Israel. Many Jews, including the leaders, consider such people as outsiders and resist their joining in the worship services even though they are willing to accept the God of Israel and follow his ways. Isaiah challenges such a parochial and narrow mentality. Isaiah states that if non-Jews “love the name of the Lord, become his servants, observe Sabbath, hold to God’s covenant,” then they must be welcomed into God’s house of prayer for “God’s house is for *all* peoples.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 67

This hymn of praise may have been written in thanksgiving for a plentiful harvest. It is chosen today because of its strong *universalistic* strain, thereby connecting it with the first and third readings.

SECOND READING: Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

These verses are a continuation of last week’s reading, which opened Paul’s discussion on the fate of Jews who reject Jesus. Paul is hoping that the crowds of Gentiles joining the New Way will arouse so much envy in his fellow Jews that they will also accept Jesus and his message. Paul expresses his hope and profound desire that all who have initially rejected Jesus will, at some time in the future, accept him. Like Isaiah and Jesus, Paul

wants *all* people to be included in God’s saving plan.

GOSPEL: Matthew 15:21-28

The biggest pastoral issue in the early Church has to do with the antagonistic treatment of Gentiles, especially those who embrace Jesus and his New Way. In Jesus’ time, Gentiles are despised by Jews and seen as “good fuel for the fires of hell.”

Matthew has Jesus confine his mission “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But Jesus is also open to showing God’s mercy to non-Jews. We can feel the tension in the story as the Gentile woman refuses to go away. The disciples want Jesus to get rid of this “blathering woman” who keeps yelling at them as she searches for deliverance for her daughter from an evil spirit. The story even shows Jesus’ reluctance to deal with her. Worse still, he calls the woman a “dog”! What’s going on here?

Some commentators try to get Jesus off the hook for his nasty remark, but perhaps we need to accept the fact that Jesus, in this case, is acting like a normal first century Jew who called Gentiles ‘dogs.’

However, the real point of this story is not Jesus and his seeming rudeness, but the woman and her wonderful tenacity and faith. She was simply not going to be put off, even by rudeness. Her come-back plea is so humble and yet so firm that even the Son of God cannot say ‘no’ to her. Fr. Dennis McBride notes: “*The Canaanite woman is the only*

person in the Gospel who has the wit to outwit Jesus. In the end, she gets what she was seeking.”

The tenacity and persistence of the woman should be a source of inspiration to all people who are in any way oppressed and put down. The Canaanite woman lives in a male-dominated society. She is a foreigner who ventures alone into a Jewish milieu. When confronted by a distant—and should we say rude—Jesus, she does not sulk. Rather, she persists until she gets what she wants. Despite her background, she ends up as one of the most highly commended persons in the Gospel. Christ came for all. God really wants all at the table. The woman’s wonderful faith in Jesus’ saving power is the central point of this story.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. The first and third readings are about God’s *inclusiveness*. How inclusive are you? Are there individuals and groups that you prefer not to mix with?
3. How would you respond if you were called a ‘dog’ directly or indirectly? What can we learn from the way the Canaanite woman handled Jesus’ insult?
4. Can you recall an experience when you had to fight hard to get something that was very important for you or for someone in your family? What was that experience like for you?
5. Generally, what is *your* response to someone who begs from you? What *should be* your response?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestion: Look at how inclusive you are in your relationships. If you can improve in this area, begin to do so.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray especially for our Church that she may find creative ways to be more inclusive without watering down her teachings. ©

***What counts is not necessarily
the size of the dog in the fight –
but the size of the fight in the dog.***

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

Save the Dates!!

**Friday, October 20 Workshop for Priests,
Deacons and Pastoral Staff**

**Saturday, October 21 Workshop for Pastoral
Facilitators of Small Christian Communities**

Fr. Art Baranowski and Theresa Doyle have worked together for 20 years and bring 50 plus years’ experience training Pastoral Leaders.

They will present from their new book “Eucharist at the Center: A Parish Structured for Evangelization.” Here at Ascension Parish, 2950 N. Harbor City Blvd Melbourne, FL 32935; more info: laurad47@bellsouth.net

Don’t miss this truly exciting opportunity!

AND

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!