

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 16, 2020 Cycle A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

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.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the 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.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

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 deems 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 opens 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.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 15:21-28

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: 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 keep 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 comeback 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.*”

(Used with permission granted by Denis McBride CSSR, *Seasons of the Word.*)

Many scholars believe that the woman’s faith helped Jesus to see that his mission was not just to the ‘lost sheep of the house of Israel’ but to all peoples—Jews and Gentiles alike.

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. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

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. For hundreds of years, African Americans were not welcome in our Church. How inclusive is our Church at this time? Who or what groups may not feel welcome in our Church?

4. In the Gospel, the woman shows great perseverance and faith. She was not going to be denied. Can you

remember a time when your perseverance and/or faith gained you something you would not have gotten without those qualities?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Reflect on who you now *exclude* from your circle of friends. If there is some group or individual(s), begin to pray about how you can have a change of heart.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Lord Jesus, you loved everyone without exception. If at this time, I am excluding someone from my circle of love, help me to have a change of heart.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Pray for all who may feel excluded in our family, Church and nations. Pray for the tenacity and faith of the woman in today’s Gospel.

*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

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord Jesus,
you love all people without exception.
You love us even when we fail you
and show prejudice. Change our hearts.
Make them big and compassionate like yours.
Amen.*