

Alleluia, alleluia! / Jesus preached the Good News of the kingdom / and healed all who were sick. / Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 15:21-28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Woman, you have great faith.

Jesus left Gennesaret and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply. 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reflections on the Gospel



THE SAVING WORD

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME / A

16 AUGUST 2020

FAITH THAT BREAKS BOUNDARIES

The perseverance and faith of the desperate Canaanite woman in today's Gospel is all the more striking because of the rebuff that she initially receives. Jesus' treatment of her is, at first sight, one of the most disturbing things in the Gospels. At first, he ignores her, then he insists that his mission is restricted to Israel. Finally, he rebuffs her with a heartless image about not throwing the children's food to dogs.

Instead of taking offence at what the image implies for her and her people, the woman seizes upon it and, with superb wit, turns it to her own advantage. Certainly, food prepared for the children is not intended for domestic animals. But children eat untidily. That provides opportunity for pet dogs under the table to gobble up the scraps that fall.

Developing the image in this way, the woman boldly challenges the restriction of Jesus' messianic mission to Israel alone, and wins from him recognition that he is Messiah not only for the Jews but also the One 'in whose name Gentiles (non-Jews, like herself) will place their hope' (Matthew 12:21).

The boundary-breaking faith of this woman of Canaan foreshadows the great mission to the nations of the world, upon which, at the end of the Gospel, the risen Lord will send the infant Church (Matthew 28:16-20).

But the woman also stands in for women of faith of all times, including our own, who challenge outworn structures and restricted vision that can cause the Church to lag behind the outreach of God's grace.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

FIRST READING

Isa 56:1, 6-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

I will lead the foreigners to my holy mountain.

Thus says the Lord: Have a care for justice, act with integrity, for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifest.

Foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord to serve him and to love his name and be his servants – all who observe the sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain. I will make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their holocausts and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.

■ The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 66:2-3, 5-6, 8. R. v. 8

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

1. O God, be gracious and bless us / and let your face shed its light upon us. / So will your ways be known upon earth / and all nations learn your saving help. **R.**

2. Let the nations be glad and exult / for you rule the world with justice. / With fairness you rule the peoples, / you guide the nations on earth. **R.**

3. Let the peoples praise you, O God; / let all the peoples praise you. / May God still give us his blessing / till the ends of the earth revere him. **R.**



SECOND READING

Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

The gifts and call of God are irrevocable.

Let me tell you pagans this: I have been sent to the pagans as their apostle, and I am proud of being sent, but the purpose of it is to make my own people envious of you, and in this way save some of them. Since their rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, do you know what their admission will mean? Nothing less than a resurrection from the dead! God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice.

Just as you changed from being disobedient to God, and now enjoy mercy because of their disobedience, so those who are disobedient now – and only because of the mercy shown to you – will also enjoy mercy eventually. God has imprisoned all men in their own disobedience only to show mercy to all mankind.

■ The word of the Lord.