

Homilies from last Sunday

Homily for the 20th Sunday of Year A

Readings: Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7; Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28



Fr Tom says:

God writes straight with crooked lines!

“God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice” (Rm 11:15), isn't that reassuring! What's more; ALL are welcome in God's world. Can it get better than that? Yes, because, according to Isaiah, when we come together to pray and worship, however difficult life is for us at the moment or however much we are in that land of loneliness and helplessness, we will find joy. (No wonder Sundays are important!)

Before we get into a lengthy debate about Jesus reference to 'dogs'; in Jesus community, all gentiles (non-Jews) were referred to as 'dogs' to show that they were unclean and therefore excluded. Think of the different nicknames we give to people or groups some are endearing but some are very negative and separatist. What we learn this week is that the Canaanite woman does not take offence at Jesus' words; in fact, she uses the reference to recognise her place before Jesus and is persistent in her request for her daughter's healing. This woman teaches us much. Even when others, insult us, speak harmfully about us, we still have a choice of how we receive it – positively or negatively. It is said that if you give a broad smile to someone who has insulted you, they will go away perplexed and worried over what they said while you will go on your way more positively; it is like turning an insult into a blessing (which is always the result of a genuine smile). The woman also teaches us about persistence, not to take no for an answer, and about recognising our need for God and, that for all our important issues in life, we cannot get by without God.

However, there is another issue. Is Jesus disobeying the will of the Father? This is not the first time Jesus has said that he has been called to preach the Good News to the Jews, the chosen people, and not concern himself with those outside. On the occasions that he does help the outsider, the Gentile, it is always in response to Faith. Nor is this a question of interpretation by Jesus. He was clear about his mission and he did not go out of his way or seek to convert the gentiles (which may have been a lot easier?) but, whenever he is faced with people of faith, he could not fail to respond to their requests. It reveals this great desire of Jesus and of the Father to bring life and the importance and value of our Faith.

This week we would also do well to reflect on the wisdom of Paul in his letter to the Romans. Although the conversion of the gentiles did not spur the nation of Israel to jealousy and accept Jesus as the promised Messiah, he speaks of us as instruments of God who lead others to Jesus sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Because mercy, reconciliation and forgiveness is lacking in the Middle East, the challenge presented to us is to be even more merciful, more forgiving and to work all the harder for reconciliation locally. We are called to be like the Canaanite woman and persistently appeal to the abundant mercy of God to bring the peace, healing and reconciliation to the countries of the Middle East and to deepen our desire to work together for life, for us to be more open and welcoming to immigrants of all races and religions who come to our land. Valued people will always be of value. Exclusion and oppression only leads to division and a depreciation of life. It prevents growth and promotes failure.

God's way, for whom, all are welcome, is the only way.

Let us, then, be instruments of welcome, of mercy, of hope, and of life!