

Synopsis: OT XX [A] (Aug 20) Sunday homily on Mt 15: 21-28 (L/17)

Introduction: All three readings today speak of the expansive and universal nature of the “Kingdom of God,” in contrast with the theory that salvation was offered first to the Jews and only then to the rest of the world. Although God set the Hebrew people apart as His chosen race, He included all nations in His plan for salvation and blessed all families of the earth in Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). By declaring through the prophet Isaiah (the first reading), “*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples,*” God reveals the truth that in His eyes there is no distinction among human beings on the basis of race, caste or color. The long-expected Messianic kingdom was intended not only for the Jews but for all nations as well. Today’s Responsorial Psalm (Ps 67) rejects all types of religious exclusivity: “*Let all the peoples praise You, O God; ...For You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth, so that Your saving power may be known among all the nations.*” In the second reading, Paul explains that, although the Jews were the chosen people, most of them denied the promised Messiah, and, consequently, God turned to the Gentiles who received mercy through their Faith in Jesus. In the Gospel story, Jesus demonstrates that salvation was meant for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews by healing the daughter of a Gentile woman as a reward for her strong Faith. Thus, Jesus shows that God's mercy and love are available to all who call out to Him in Faith.

Life messages: #1) We need to persist in prayer with trustful confidence. Although the essential parts of prayer are adoration and thanksgiving, the prayer of petition plays a big part in our daily lives. Christ himself has told us to ask him for these needs: “*Ask and you shall receive.*” Asking with fervor and perseverance proves that we have the “great Faith” we need to receive what Christ wants to grant us in response to our requests. We must realize and remember that we do not

always get exactly what we ask for, but rather, God gives us what He knows we really need, what He wants for us and what is really best for us. As Christians, we also know that our particular request may not always be for our good, or for the final good of the person for whom we are praying. But if the prayer is sincere and persevering we will always get an answer -- one which is better than what we asked for.

#2) We need to pull down our walls of separation and share in the universality of God's love: Very often we set up walls which separate us from God and from one another. Today's Gospel reminds us that God's love and mercy are extended to all who call on Him in Faith and trust, no matter who they are. In other words, God's care extends beyond the boundaries of race and nation to the hearts of all who live, and God's House should become a House of Prayer for all peoples. It is therefore fitting that we should pray and work sincerely so that the walls which our pride, intolerance and prejudice have raised may crumble.

OT XX [A] (Aug 20) Is 56:1, 6-7; Rom 11:13-15, 29-32; Mt 15:21-28

Anecdote (**Why anecdotes?** Mt 13: 34: *All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable*). # 1) "Never give up!": Many years ago in Illinois, a young man with six months schooling to his credit ran for an office in the legislature. As might have been expected, he was beaten. Next, he entered business but failed in that too, and spent the next seventeen years paying the debts of his worthless partner. He fell in love with a charming lady, they became engaged – and she died. He had a nervous breakdown. He ran for Congress and was defeated. He then tried to obtain an appointment to the U.S. Land Office but didn't succeed. He became a candidate for the Vice-Presidency and lost. Two years later he was defeated in a race for the Senate. He

ran for President and finally was elected. That man was Abraham Lincoln. Today's gospel presents a Canaanite woman who persisted in her prayer and obtained from the Lord what she prayed for.

2: "If Christians have caste differences..." M. K. Gandhi in his autobiography tells how, during his days in South Africa as a young Indian lawyer, he read the Gospels and saw in the teachings of Jesus the answer to the major problem facing the people of India, the caste system. Seriously considering embracing the Christian faith, Gandhi went to a white-only church one Sunday morning, intending to talk to the pastor about the idea. When he entered the Church, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and told him to go and worship with his own colored people. Gandhi left the Church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." (Fr. Munacci)

3: Religious fanaticism: A Jewish professor of psychology said of his tradition, "If there are ten Jewish males in a city, we create a synagogue. If there are eleven Jewish males, we start thinking about creating a competing synagogue." A Baptist police officer had a similar tale. He said, "One Baptist family in a neighborhood witnesses until they bring another family to Christ. Then they form a Church, and start witnessing to the rest of the community. When another family joins, they have a schism and form a rival Church." According to a Presbyterian homemaker, her communion was a little like vegetable soup. "We have," she said, "the OPs, RPs, BPs, and Split Peas!" And a Methodist businessman complemented these tales with an apocryphal tale of a man from his Faith community who had been shipwrecked for years on a small island. When found by a passing ship, rescuers asked him why he had constructed three huts, since he was there by himself. "Well," he replied, "that one is my home, that one is my Church, and that one is my former Church."

Today's Gospel tells us how Jesus extended his healing mission to the Gentiles too.

Introduction: All three readings today speak of the expansive and universal nature of the "Kingdom of God," in contrast with the protocol of the day which demanded that salvation should come first to the Jews and then to all the people of the earth. Although God set the Hebrew people apart as His chosen race, He included all nations in His plan for salvation and blessed all families of the earth in Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). By declaring through the prophet Isaiah (the first reading), "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples,*" God reveals the truth that in His eyes there is no distinction among human beings on the basis of race, caste or color. The long-expected Messianic kingdom was intended, not only for the Jews, but for all nations as well. In other words, we all belong to one another; hence, there is no place for discrimination among God's children. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 67) rejects all types of religious exclusivity: "*Let all the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. For You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth, so that Your saving power may be known among all the nations.*" In the second reading, Paul explains that, although the Jews were the chosen people, most of them denied the promised Messiah. Consequently, God turned to the Gentiles who received His mercy through their Faith in Jesus. In the Gospel story, Jesus demonstrates that salvation is meant for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews by healing the daughter of a Gentile woman as a reward for her strong Faith. Thus, He shows that God's mercy and love are available to all who call out to Him in Faith.

The first reading explained ([Isaiah 56:1, 6-7](#)): The third part of the book of the prophet Isaiah (chapters 56-66), was written mainly for the Jews who were returning from the Babylonian exile to join their relatives who had been left behind

in Judea. But today's lesson is primarily addressed to those Jews who, after the Exile had officially ended, still chose to remain in Babylon as Jews among the Gentiles. In this passage, the Lord God not only pleaded with these people who preferred exile to the labor of returning to the Promised Land to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, but also tried to make them understand the role the Gentiles would have in their restored kingdom. Though in the past all who came to the God of Israel were required to accept the Law and the Covenant, God's concern for those outside that Covenant led Him to a new and radical solution. "*The foreigners,*" the Lord God declared through Isaiah, "*who join themselves to Yahweh, ministering to Him, loving the name of Yahweh and becoming His servants . . . them I will bring to My holy mountain and make joyful in My house of prayer . . . for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*" Thus Isaiah's prophecy consoled those Jews who had married Gentiles by assuring them that their God was equally interested in the people of other nations and in the descendants of Abraham. Hence, the exclusivist claims of the Jews as God's chosen people would have to yield as God made room for others. For besides the exiles of Israel, Yahweh would receive the non-Israelites who had joined themselves to the Lord. In short, the prophet reports, everyone has a part to play in God's plan — even those who don't belong to the "true religion."

In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 67) the Psalmist sings God's blessing on the people of Israel and calls on all nations and peoples to praise God. The Psalm is a response to Yahweh's declaration in the first reading that the Gentiles will be accepted at the altar of Yahweh.

Second Reading explained ([Romans 11:13-15, 29-32](#)): In Romans 9 – 11, Paul asks how God could apparently go back on His promise to Abraham that Abraham's descendants would always be God's chosen people, now that those

descendants had rejected Jesus. Paul answers his own question by explaining that it had been God's plan all along to allow the Jews to reject Jesus, so that the few Jews who accepted Jesus and went out to preach the Good News, like Paul himself, would be forced to turn to the Gentiles and bring them into the Covenant. Frustrated by the slow pace of Jewish conversions, Paul devoted his preaching mission to the Gentiles, so that the Jews would become jealous and accept Jesus. Thus, God's secret plan to invite all people into the Covenant would be revealed and completed. By the statement, "*Their rejection is the reconciliation of the world,*" Paul meant that the Jews' rejection of Jesus allowed the world (the pagans, the Gentiles), to be reconciled to God. By asking the question, "*What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*" he meant that the Jews who accepted Christ would receive new life through the once spiritually dead pagans. Paul was convinced that the Jewish nation would eventually accept Christ because God's "*irrevocable*" call, given to them through Abraham, was a call to eternal salvation. Paul's failure to convert his fellow-Jews serves as a model for us who must accept failure in our own lives, especially when it concerns our loved ones who refuse what we judge to be to their advantage. Paul's message is also a challenge to us to pray fervently and often for the conversion of the Jews.

Gospel exegesis: The significance of the miracle: The Gospels describe only two miraculous healings Jesus performed for Gentiles: the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt 8:10-12) in Capernaum, and the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman which we hear today. The encounter with the Canaanite woman took place outside Jewish territory in Tyre and Sidon, two coastal cities, twenty-five and fifty miles north of Galilee in present-day Lebanon. The story of this miracle is told by Mark (7:24-30) as well as by Matthew (15:21-23). Both miracles foreshadow the extension of the Gospel, the Good News, to the whole

world. The woman in the today's miracle belonged to the old Canaanite stock of the Syro-Phoenician race. The Canaanites were the ancestral enemies of the Jews and were regarded as pagans and idolaters and, hence, as ritually unclean. But this woman showed "a gallant and an audacious love which grew until it worshipped at the feet of the Divine, an indomitable persistence springing from an unconquerable hope, a cheerfulness which would not be dismayed" (Fr. James Rowland). By granting the persistent request of the pagan woman, Jesus demonstrates that his mission is to break down the barriers and to remove the long-standing walls of division and mutual prejudice between the Jews and the Gentiles. God does not discriminate but welcomes all who believe in Him, who ask for His mercy and who try to do His will.

Trustful persistence rewarded. Jesus first ignores both the persistent cry of the woman and the impatience of his disciples to send the woman away. He then tries to awaken true Faith in the heart of this woman by an indirect refusal, telling her, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" But the woman is persistent in her request. She *kneels* before him and *begs*, "*Lord, help me.*" Now Jesus makes a seemingly harsh statement, "*It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*" The term "*dogs*" was a derogatory Jewish word for the Gentiles. Dogs were regarded by the Jews as unclean, because they would eat anything given to them, including pork. The woman noticed, however, that Jesus had used the word *kunariois*--the word for household pets -- rather than the ordinary Greek word for dogs - *kuon*. She also observed that Jesus had used the word for dogs in a joking way -- a sort of test of the woman's Faith. So she immediately matched wits with Jesus. Her argument runs like this: Pets are not outsiders but insiders. They not only belong to the family, but are part of the family. While they do not have a seat at the table, they enjoy intimacy at the

family's feet. Hence, the woman replied: *"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table"* (v. 27), expressing her Faith that Jesus could and would heal her daughter. Jesus was completely won over by the depth of her Faith, her confidence and her wit and responded exuberantly, *"Woman, great is your Faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."* We notice that the woman was refused three times by Jesus before he granted her request and finally, the fourth time, her persistence was rewarded and her plea was answered. This Gospel episode is an account of a woman who got more from the Kingdom of God than she hoped for. The woman came to Jesus asking for one miracle and she got two. This is really a double miracle, for the daughter was exorcised of her demonic possession and received a new life, and the mother, through her experience with Christ, found a new life as well. The greatness of this woman's Faith consists in: a) her willingness to cross the barrier of racism; b) her refusal to be put off or ignored because of her position in life and c) her humility in admitting that she did not deserve the Master's attention and time.

Life messages: #1) We need to persist in prayer with trustful confidence. Although the essential parts of prayer are adoration and thanksgiving, the prayer of petition plays a big part in most people's daily life. We cannot provide, by our unaided selves, for our spiritual and temporal needs. Christ himself has told us to ask him for these needs: "Ask and you shall receive." Asking with fervor and perseverance proves that we have the "great Faith" we need to be able to receive all that Christ wants to grant us in response to our requests. We must realize and remember that we do not always get exactly what we ask for, but rather what God knows we need, what He wants for us and what is really best for us. What we need most is to receive the peace and security that come from being in harmony with God's will for us. As Christians, we also know that our particular

requests may not always be for our good, or for the final good of the person for whom we are praying. In that case, the good God will not grant what would be to our, or their, eternal harm. But if the prayer is sincere and persevering, we will always get an answer – one which is better than what we asked for. Hence let us trust that every time we pray for something, the answer is **already on its way** before we even asked God. We just need to trust God's timetable and infinite wisdom that he will answer us according to His will and purpose.

#2) We need to pull down our walls of separation and share in the universality of God's love: Very often we set up walls which separate us from God and from one another. Today's Gospel reminds us that God's love and mercy are extended to all who call on him in Faith and trust, no matter who they are. In other words, God's care extends beyond the boundaries of race and nation to the hearts of all who live, and God's House should become a House of prayer for all peoples. It is therefore fitting that we should pray that the walls which our pride, intolerance and prejudice have raised, may crumble. Next, we have to be grateful to God for all the blessings we enjoy. As baptized members of the Christian community, we have been given special privileges and easy access to God's love. But we also have serious responsibilities arising from these gifts. One of these responsibilities is to make clear to others, with true humility and compassion, that God's love, mercy and healing are for them also because they too are the children of God.

JOKE OF THE WEEK

Faith in theory and action: A man who was walking close to a steep cliff lost his footing and plunged over the side. As he was falling he grabbed the branch of a tree that was sticking out about half-way down the cliff. He managed to hang onto a weak limb with both hands. He looked up and he saw that the cliff was almost

perfectly straight and that he was a long way from the top. He looked down and it was a long, long way down to the rocky bottom. At this point the man decided that it was time to pray. He didn't pray a long, wordy prayer. He simply yelled out, "God, if you're there, help me!" About that time he heard a deep voice coming from high up above that said, "I'm here My son, have no fear." The man was a little startled at first by God's voice, but he pleaded, "Can You help me? Can You help me?" God replied, "Yes, I can My son, but you have to have Faith. Do you trust Me?" The man answered, "Yes Lord, I trust You." God said, "Do you really trust Me?" The man, straining to hold on replied, "Yes Lord, I really trust You." Then God said, "This is what I want you to do: let go of the limb, trust Me, and everything will be all right." The man looked down at the rocks below, then he looked up at the steep cliff above him and yelled, "Is there anybody else up there who can help me?"