

Fr. Jeff's Weekly Homily

20th Sunday in ordinary time
August 17, 2008

READING 1: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Psalm 67

O God, let all the nations praise you.

READING 2: Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

GOSPEL: Matthew 15: 21-28

And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have mercy on me, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon."

One of the reasons people read the gospel so rarely is that it is so very challenging. We'd prefer not to know what it really asks of us, thank you very much. I mean it says: "If you want to find yourself, lose yourself;" "If you want to be my disciples, go, sell all you have and give it to the poor;" "It tells us we will be judged on whether we fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, took care of the sick, visited the imprisoned, clothed the naked.' It says, if you want to be first put everyone else ahead of you.

Well that's not going to win gold medals. That one for all mentality is just impossible. All this loving, all this giving, all this teamwork, well, we'd rather be the star. The gospel way is asking too much.

It's in order to subvert that falsehood, I think, that the gospels give us the apostles; they are so much like the rest of us. They say, "send these people away so they can fend for themselves." Jesus responds, "feed them yourselves." Today they say, "Send this woman away, she is so annoying." Jesus responds by showing them that all people, of all nations, all races, all ways of life seek the same grace and are God's beloved.

We know, of course, that the Romans were in control and oppressed the Israelites. The Jews made themselves feel better by oppressing their pagan neighbors. It worked for the Romans. Look how long the British were able to oppress the Irish by keeping the Protestants and Catholics fighting with each other rather than against their real

oppressor. Tyrants know all about dividing to conquer. The devil is the greatest of tyrants and is constantly looking for ways to divide us: nation against nation, race against race, religion against religion, brother against brother and sister against sister. Evil has been around a long time and knows exactly how to manipulate so as to divide God's children.

God knows the human heart too and loves each of us. It's arrogant to assume God would love me more than God loves you. It's got to hurt God as much as it does any parent when the children refuse to speak to each other or when one adult child makes claims to superiority over the other. In the early Church, Jewish Christians felt superior to Gentile Christians, after all, they had the birthright as God's chosen race. Very early, that kind of thinking was transcended. The gospel can be tough, but it proves itself true throughout history. If the early Church hadn't quickly converted to accepting all people equally, the Church would not have survived. Nations that believe in their own superiority got crushed in World Wars. My friends, we are reminded again that God's way is the only way to lasting life.

The gospel is challenging, but it is also true and that is good news!

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