

First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Second Reading: Romans 11.13-15, 29-32

Gospel: Matthew 15.21-28 20.19-31

In today's readings Isaiah speaks of the foreigners who will honour the Lord, keep his day holy and serve him. I am reminded of the first missionaries who came to our shores so many years ago – the Canadian Martyrs and particularly the Oblates – bringing with them the Word of God, the Good News. They were not so different from Saints Peter and Paul who were sent to foreign peoples and lands. We are the Gentiles. We gather honouring the Lord, and serving God as we are called.

“For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.” Now - I do not for a moment think that our struggles and sorrows are being laid upon us to imprison us so that God can save us. Paul suggests that if we reflect deeply we may see a different face of God who takes the opportunity to carry and walk with us through our brokenness and woundedness. Jesus is simply waiting for us to reach out a hand to him as Peter did in last week's Gospel when he started to sink.

Matthews Gospel is complex as it speaks of man-made boundaries, deep faith and audacious love.

Gerald Darring, a regular contributor to the Center for the Liturgy Sunday Website at the University of St. Louis suggests that in Jesus's response “O woman, great is your faith” that he was unable to resist her determination. She was a woman being true to herself; a woman - like women today who “...are becoming ever more conscious of their dignity... as human beings.”¹

¹ Gerald Darring: *The Perspective of Justice.*

Eleonore Stump, a professor and author writes that "...to have faith is to be one of the sheep of Israel and one of the children of Abraham. Gentile, female, or whatever else might make the disciples think that she is a person who doesn't matter, she has the one thing that really does matter in her - [being faithful] to Jesus."² And while it is true that Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel – she, a gentile woman persisted in calling to him. She is one of those lost sheep. "When Jesus crosses into Gentile territory, it is for her."³

Ron Rolheiser⁴ who is both a theologian and prolific writer, speaks of boundaries that we create, of programs we set up and try to ensure that we adhere to them within the letter-of-the-law. In today's Gospel the story of Jesus being confronted by a Canaanite woman asking him to cure her daughter could be translated with this story:

"It was the night of the Easter Vigil. Jesus had just helped to conduct an eight-month RCIA program and was helping set up things for the candidates who were to be baptized at the Vigil liturgy, when a woman, who hadn't taken the program, came up to him and said: 'Jesus, leader of this RCIA program, I would like to be baptized tonight, with these others.' Jesus replied: 'You never took the program! This is only for those who took it. It isn't fair to them to baptize you!' But she addressed Jesus a second time: 'Jesus, you who are the compassion of God for the world and not just for this parish and program, I'm as ready as all those who did take the program!' And Jesus, after interviewing her, right then and there, concludes: 'Amen. Indeed you are more ready than any of the candidates

² Eleonore Stump: *Glancing Thoughts*, What matters.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ron Rolheiser OMI: *In Exile – The Tyranny of Program*

scheduled for baptism tonight. Step into line and be baptized ... even though you didn't take the program'!

Sometimes it helps to stop looking at the rubrics, the programs; letting go of the letter of the law. When COVID-19 arrived I found myself dwelling on how different it was with our churches being closed; how isolated I felt during the initial lockdown. I felt vulnerable and confused because nothing seemed the same as it had been before the pandemic. I kept asking Jesus to hold and console me, to find me in a world that I no longer knew how to navigate on my own. It took me awhile – heck it is still taking me awhile. But I persist in trying to look at this new and challenging way of being. There are blessings: when I see people who smile as I pass them in the street; the staff in stores who help me to navigate ever-changing directions and ways to enter and exit the store and which aisle goes up as the other goes in the opposite direction. I learn how to smile through my mask and to recognize the smiles of each of you as you wear your masks and let your eyes do the smiling.

Transformation! I'm looking at a new world – hopefully with eyes like those of the Canaanite woman – eyes recognizing her own dignity, seeing through the lens of deep faith and persistence and with a heart full of audacious love.

In these challenging times we are invited to enter into a new way of being – with new eyes and new hearts. Our models - Jesus & the Canaanite woman. Jesus and all others who are deemed not to matter.

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