

20th Sunday

In God's eyes there are to be no fences, no walls between people. The Scriptures point out the desire of God that all people be included in the one family of God. No one is to be excluded. This was the message that God preached through the prophets. This is what Jesus preached when he spoke about the kingdom of God. This is what he acts out in the Gospel today. When tragedies happen, we all come together to support one another. There was zero talk of ethnicity/ language/ religion; that night humanity reigned! Such attitudes and gestures show us that we can go beyond barriers and boundaries.

The first and second readings set the stage for the drama in the gospel. Isaiah gives voice to GOD's intention to extend Israel's privileges to all "foreigners who join themselves to the LORD." GOD yearns to be in relationship with all peoples. Through the prophet Isaiah, God declares, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples". In the second reading St. Paul emphasizes that GOD's mercy is intended for all, whether Jew or Gentile.

All of today's readings speak of the expansive and gracious nature of the "kingdom of God," denying the protocol of the day demanding that salvation should come first to the Jews and then to all the people of the earth. Although God chose the Hebrew people as His chosen race, He included all nations in His plan for salvation and blessed all families of the earth in Abraham. The point is that God' mercy and love is available to all who call out to him in faith. That is the heart of the gospel message. Certainly, God singled out the Jews to be his chosen people. It is from among them that the Messiah comes. This is a privilege.

What is important is our faith. Not how much we have but what we do with what we've got. The Canaanite woman was a pagan, but Jesus commends her faith and gives her what she wants. The Pharisees are filled to the brim with beliefs and doctrines, but Jesus condemns their hypocrisy. Certainly, Jesus wants faith, but it must be sincere faith; faith with humility and love.

We often build fences, between ourselves, and those who are different from us. These fences have to come down if we are to be followers of Jesus. The purpose of the fences and walls is to separate and alienate and destroy the unity of humankind. Today more than ever there is a need to pull down the walls of separation and share in the universality of God's love.

In the gospel, no barrier could keep the Canaanite woman away from JESUS... neither his indifferent silence nor his statement about his mission "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", nor his apparent rebuke. Her persistent faith persuaded JESUS to reach beyond ethnic/ geographical boundaries to cure her daughter. Jesus sees all that is good within the human heart. He saw the faith of the Canaanite woman. She proves to be one of the most remarkable people in the Gospels. She doesn't want just the crumbs – she wants the whole loaf – her child's cure. Her faith that is persistent wins the day. He sees your faith and my faith. He loves us more than we love ourselves. We are called to experience the fire of God's love and to allow ourselves to be exposed to the fire of God's love in others as well.

Do I reach out in love to all people irrespective of gender, caste, class, creed or ethnicity? Will I imitate GOD and go beyond borders and barriers? We gather today, all of us different from one another, all with different histories, different experience, different genes, different in so many

ways, to remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We gather at one table, partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus and become one with him. We are then called to go into our world and bring into that oneness all the people we meet.