

20th Sun of Ord (Isa 56:1,6-7; Roms 11:13-15,29-32; Mt 15:21-28) 20 Aug 2023

All three of our readings today deal with outsiders, specifically non-Jewish outsiders. When we hear scripture verses like the one we heard from Isaiah, with phrases like: “my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Or refrains like in our psalm that cry out: “let all the nations praise God.” We don’t tend to think much about it. As 21st century Christians, we are quite accustomed to not only welcoming converts but we are also aware of our call to share the Good News of Christ with all our neighbors and to welcome and to love them. However, our perspective is quite different in comparison to the original audiences of the scripture writers.

It would seem that the Jewish people of Old Testament times, as well as the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus, held a rather narcissistic view of themselves. They may have accepted converts but there is no evidence of God’s chosen people ever recruiting outsiders. It would take some 20 years **after** Jesus’ resurrection before Paul would become the first disciple missionary; telling the Gentiles that God has delivered all and has mercy upon all. Consequently, the Apostles’ objections to the Canaanite women seeking a cure for her daughter, isn’t particularly surprising. What is surprising, at least for me, is Jesus’ initial response to the situation.

When the apostles ask Jesus to send the woman away, he doesn’t welcome her. He initially ignores her, and then after she pleads again, he tells the woman that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. His response is probably consistent with his human upbringing in a Jewish household. Jesus, the human being, is from a definitive people, with a particular ethnic heritage that possessed its own distinct customs and its own disdain for many of their neighbors. But I would have expected Jesus, the Son of God, to seize the opportunity to demonstrate God’s love

for this foreign woman when presented the opportunity. Even when the woman persists, Jesus doesn't give in. He even goes so far as to compare her to a begging dog before he finally relents and cures her daughter. For me, it is difficult to figure out what's going on here. So I did some research!

Several explanations are offered for Jesus' behavior in this scriptural account that occurs in both Mark and Matthew's versions of the Gospel. I'll let you look those up on your own time. Suffice it to say, the most likely explanation for Jesus resisting this woman is the same reason that he resisted his mother's plea at the wedding feast of Cana. It simply wasn't his time. Jesus was in northern Galilee teaching his apostles and preparing them for the events to come. This woman just happens to come to Jesus at an inopportune time. But just as he could not resist his mother's plea, Jesus is unable to ignore the plea of the faith-filled Canaanite.

As a parent, grandparent or perhaps even as an aunt or uncle, we've no doubt endured the incessant pleading of a cute little youngster who just has to have this, that or the other thing. And most likely, perhaps after a tantrum or two, the child has eventually received that for which they were longing. Sometimes we like to think that the child simply wore us down but in reality, I believe, that in our hearts we always really want to give in. I believe the ultimate cause for the child's reward is not the plea but rather it is our love for them and our desire for them to experience the happiness that results with the granted wish. This is the same type of love and desire that the Lord holds for all his children.

Was Jesus worn down by the woman's persistence? I think not. I think he always wanted to shower this woman and all the Gentiles with the same love that he held for the people of Israel. Yes, the nation of Israel held a particular precedence with God in the covenant that they shared but their covenant in no way precluded God from extending his mercy to all of his creation. For God's love, there are no outsiders. If we have faith and persist in prayer, if we love and trust in

the Lord, if we approach Jesus with humility, then - ready or not; good timing or bad - we will feel and we will know his love.