

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - August 16, 2020

God's Grace Is Universal and Excludes No One

God's message to us in today's liturgy is that the "Divine Life" is opened to all peoples. God's grace is universal and excludes no one. (While we were sinners, Christ died for all.) We see this theme in our first reading for today from the prophet Isaiah. Through the prophet Isaiah we hear God's declaration: "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*" God reveals the truth that there is no distinction among all people. All humans have been created in His image and likeness. Even though Israel was *A Chosen Race, A Holy People* and *A People Set Apart*, God made it clear that Israel was not chosen by merit, but by grace. God's intention was that - through Israel - the whole world would be saved. Consequently, the long-expected Messianic kingdom was intended not only for the Jews but for all nations. Our beautiful Psalm today is a response to Yahweh's declaration that both the Jews and the Gentiles will be accepted at the altar of Yahweh. In other words, all people belong to Yahweh.

Power of Persistent Prayer

Then we turn to our Gospel passage for today, which is the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter. This encounter with the Canaanite woman took place outside of Jewish territory in Tyre and Sidon, two coastal cities, twenty-five and fifty miles, north of Galilee. This miracle foreshadows the extension of the Gospel, the Good News, to the whole world. The

woman in today's miracle belongs 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. By granting the persistent request of the pagan woman, Jesus demonstrates that His mission is to break down all 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. God's grace is universal and excludes no one.

Brothers and sisters, notice that Jesus was not dismissive of this woman's plea. His hour of Salvation for the Gentiles had simply not come yet. Remember: salvation was to the Jews first but also extended to the Gentiles. (Rom 1:16) Salvation was for Israel first; through Israel the whole world would experience God's saving Grace. This story reminds us of the wedding feast at Cana where Jesus was perceived to be seemingly indifferent to the couple's plight, because His time had not yet come. The interesting thing about Jesus' mission was how it played out within the limits of time and space.

When Jesus spoke about the unfairness of throwing children's food to the house dogs, he was making use of a popular Jewish idiomatic expression. This expression helped to bind Jewish thinking with Jesus' primary mission: converting the Jews to believe that he was the Son of God. Through Israel the whole world would be saved. Friends, notice that When Jesus' time was right in the post resurrection missionary mandate, he instructed his disciples, "*Go make disciples of all nations.*" Jesus also prophesied that many will come from the East and West and take their place in the Kingdom of Heaven. God's grace is for all people and excludes no one.

Go Make A Difference

Today, God calls us to look beyond those categories we often use for one another and realize that God's grace is open to everyone, the great and the small, the righteous as well as sinner, the rich and the poor. Today we, too, are called to be channels of God's grace; sowing love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, faith where there is doubt, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness and joy where there is sadness. We are called to go make a difference in the world. God has called us to be salt and light of the world. We are called to be hands of Christ reaching out to those in need. We are the spirit of hope and the voice of peace.

May our hearts be opened to receive God's Grace today. May God grant the deepest desires of our heart as He did for the Canaanite Woman in today's Gospel. May God give us the grace to persist in our prayers with trustful confidence as the woman in today's Gospel. God's grace is for all people; his grace is universal and excludes no one.