

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday- A Deacon Pat Hall

ISaiah 56:1, 6-7; ROMans 11:13-15, 29-32; MaTthew 15:21-28

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/082017.cfm>*

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Who are God's people?

Isaiah said God's house of prayer was for all peoples.

Our Psalm claims God's guidance to all nations and that He rules the peoples with equity.

Paul's letter says that given the pagans' acceptance of Jesus Christ through Jewish revelation, he hoped that unbelieving Jews would turn to Christ out of jealousy of the pagans' new-found relationship with Christ.

And in Matthew our Gospel shows that Jesus' ministry extends beyond his mission to the chosen people.

There is God... and there are his people. That's it.

Now due to the sin of Adam, we have separated ourselves from God and from each other. We think of "us people" and "those people" and "those people" are not described so kindly much of the time.

We divide ourselves and divide ourselves over every disagreement and difference of opinion. We become passionately attached to what we know is true and so become passionately oppositional to any other perspective or challenge. When we receive passionate push-back from "those people" we feel threatened and throw up our defenses. They become excluded from us. Some claim that the only true defense is a pre-emptive strike. And so the cycle of fear, terror and violence is perpetuated.

Spend a little time thinking of all the "us people" and "those people" in your life.

Now, it is a dangerous world out there. North Korea threatens nukes. There are those in our own county who would make you their victim to robbery or violence. We are duty-bound to defend our selves and our country.

Yet in our defense preparations do we make those to whom we are opposed out to be something less as our selves, less deserving, less a child of God?

I remember some of the political cartoons depicting Japanese and Germans during World War II. They were caricaturized as something less than human. And yet today, their children's children are among our closest allies in the civilized world.

The distance between me and “those people”... is because they are unlike me. Why can't they get it like I get it? Why can't they be like me? Now, I know my wife, Jan, loves me, but I also know she would say that one Pat Hall in the world is enough.

It must be one of God's biggest sorrows to see how we divide ourselves and oppose each other. I know that my father's biggest heartache was to see two of his sons estranged from each other. He loved those sons so much only to have to witness their mutual disgust for each other.

So how does “us” and “those” become “a people”? Isaiah said that foreigners who joined the Lord will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Our Psalm says God treats all with equity, those who follow his guidance will exult and be glad. Romans speaks of the converts being saved through the Jews and the Jews being saved by the example of the converts. And our Gospel has a Canaanite woman claiming Jesus, of Jewish descent, as her Lord. This is a woman from a people who rejected the Jews through whom God has woven our salvation history. And it is her plea to the Lord of all peoples that inspires Jesus' healing of her daughter, this daughter of the woman of great faith.

It is through Jesus, despite all of our differences, that we become one people.

That was made painfully clear to me at a police call I responded to many years ago. I was called to a local laundromat which was having trouble with a drunk. I arrived. The manager told the man to leave. He refused. I advised him of the consequences. He refused ... and he resisted. His nick-name is “Butter”... I think because he was pretty slippery. Well, after rolling around with him on the floor before being able to get his handcuffs on, we had a bit of a ride to the jail where I was called everything but a child of God. Still, he was treated with the dignity due any human being, that being my professional duty and graced to be able to do so even when one's own elbows and knees were aching from the earlier roll-around.

In the calm of the booking room, it became evident that he was a Christian, something I claim, too. To fast forward the story, a few months later he invited me to his wedding. His graciousness astounded me. He passed a divine gift along to me that continues to inform all of my later encounters. It was through *faith* in Jesus, that we became one people.

That is the faith that our mother in our Gospel shares with us. Her petition was not for her, but for her daughter's sake. She was met first with silence. Then her plea was returned with a discouraging retort. Yet her faith did not lag. She clung to that faith and was rewarded with healing.

Have you had that experience? Have you ever felt your plea to God was met with silence? Have you ever felt that your plea was summarily dismissed? Did you get discouraged? Did you lose faith? Did you cling to faith or find faith? Did you ever finally embrace God's providential response?

Jesus, himself, experienced that sense of silence to his plea. When on the cross, he cried out:

*“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”\**— which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27: 46)

In his extremis on the cross, Jesus proclaimed these, the first words of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, a psalm which starts with seeming despair, but concludes with:

*Then I will proclaim your name to my brethren;  
in the assembly I will praise you...  
For he has not spurned or disdained  
the misery of this poor wretch,  
Did not turn away from me,  
but heard me when I cried out.*

Jesus never lost faith in his father.

It is that faith that we are called to enter into every time we come to his altar. We come to conform ourselves to Christ, to have his true presence enter into our very selves.

The Sacrament is mystical. It is miraculous. But it only comes to completion when you open your heart and mind and soul in accepting it, in embracing it, in consuming it totally, conforming yourself to Christ.

If I do the same... if I allow Jesus to conform my heart during blessed reception of his paschal grace, you and I will become one people. Being conformed in Jesus' Sacred Heart, we go forth to serve God's people and to share his grace with others... much like Butter graciously did for me.

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