

Reading 1 JER 31:1-7

At that time, says the LORD,
I will be the God of all the tribes of Israel,
and they shall be my people.
Thus says the LORD:
The people that escaped the sword
have found favor in the desert.
As Israel comes forward to be given his rest,
the LORD appears to him from afar:
With age-old love I have loved you;
so I have kept my mercy toward you.
Again I will restore you, and you shall be
rebuilt,
O virgin Israel;
Carrying your festive tambourines,
you shall go forth dancing with the
merrymakers.
Again you shall plant vineyards
on the mountains of Samaria;
those who plant them shall enjoy the fruits.
Yes, a day will come when the watchmen
will call out on Mount Ephraim:
"Rise up, let us go to Zion,
to the LORD, our God."
For thus says the LORD:
Shout with joy for Jacob,
exult at the head of the nations;
proclaim your praise and say:
The LORD has delivered his people,
the remnant of Israel.

Who are God's people?

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

Due to the sin of Adam, we have separated ourselves from God and from each other. We think in terms of "us" and "those people".

We divide over every difference of opinion. We become passionate about what we know is true and passionately oppose anything else. When we receive push-back from "those people" we feel threatened. They react in turn and so the cycle of fear and even violence is perpetuated.

Proclaiming self-defense, we accuse our adversaries to be something less than us, less deserving, less a child of God. It must be one of God's biggest sorrows to see how his children oppose each other.

So how can "we" and "those" become "a people"?

Gospel MT 15:21-28

At that time Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out,
"Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!
My daughter is tormented by a demon."
But he did not say a word in answer to her.
His disciples came and asked him,
"Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us."
He said in reply,
"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me."
He said in reply,
"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."
She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."
Then Jesus said to her in reply,
"O woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish."
And her daughter was healed from that hour.

The Gospel speaks of a Canaanite woman claiming Jesus, a Jew, as her Lord. This is a woman from a people who rejects the Jews. It is her plea to the Lord of all peoples that inspires Jesus' healing of her daughter.

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

That was made painfully clear to me on 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, we rolled around on the floor a bit before I was able to get handcuffs on him. On our ride to the jail, I was called everything but a child of God. Still, he was treated with the dignity due any human being. That was my professional duty. I also relied on God's grace to counter any vengeful feelings due to my own elbows and knees aching from the earlier roll-around.

In the calm of the booking room, it became evident that he was a Christian... something I also claim. 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 I can share with others. It was through *faith* in Jesus, that we became one people.

That is the faith that our Canaanite mother 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 cling to faith ... or find faith?

The more we emulate that mother, the more we are conformed to Jesus. It comes to completion when we open our hearts and minds and souls in accepting it. It is miraculous. By embracing it and allowing Jesus to transform us into one people, we are made holy. We become a people destined for eternity, an eternity grounded in our here and now.

May we go forth to serve God's people and to share his grace with others... much like Butter graciously did for me.