

Commentary on the Readings for Today, August 20, 2023

The 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's "politically correct" conscious world, the Readings for *today* might be classified as "exclusive" versus "inclusive." The Jews always considered themselves as special in the eyes of God and rightly so, because it was through them that Jesus came to be. Our religious faith, history and traditions are based on what the Jews gave us. However, they also considered God as their own to the exclusion of everyone else. This was not God's or Jesus' intention. The ultimate objective of God was **"that all might be One"** through Jesus Christ. **(John 17:21)**

In the **First Reading**, from the ***Prophet Isaiah (56:1-7)***, the Prophet is preaching to the returned Babylonian Exiles who brought with them many foreigners — friends, relatives and slaves. Tensions developed between these newcomers and those who had never left Israel. The prophet is telling everyone that God accepts all those who are willing to follow God's laws with sincerity and purity of heart. Together they may enter the temple — ***"His house of prayer."***

The **Responsorial Psalm (67:2- 8)** is a harvest song praising God for blessing the earth with an abundance of food for the people of Israel. Its intent was to have all "the nations" see how God blessed the Jews so that ultimately the nations would accept and bless the God of Israel as well.

In the **Second Reading**, from ***St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (11:13-32)***, St. Paul is frustrated with the Jews for not accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Messiah. He tells us that their rejection of Christ resulted in their loss but our gain of salvation; but when they do come to accept Christ (as is ultimately predicted), it will be for the glory of all mankind.

The **Gospel Reading** is from ***Matthew (15:21-28)***. This passage has some strange language in it, especially from Jesus. Our society today has some equally strange (and derogatory) names for people of other races or ethnic origins, all of which are wrong. However, in Jesus' time, calling gentiles "dogs" was part of their "exclusive" cultural pride. Jesus tells the Canaanite woman that His mission is "only to the lost sheep of Israel." If Jesus were only a Jew this would have been enough and the encounter would have ended there. But Jesus was God and the love of God knows no cultural or ethnic limits. He sees into the heart of this foreign woman and, in spite of "His mission," He grants her request because her faith was stronger than both cultures.

We should take courage from these readings because they tell us that God wants all mankind to be happy with Him in heaven at the end of time. There are no limits to race, creed or ethnic origin, as God tell us in the above passage from Isaiah, ***"All those who keep the Sabbath and hold to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain, heaven."*** Just something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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