

## God Wants to Save Us All

In the Gospel for this Sunday (Matt. 15: 21-28), Jesus shocks us by appearing to show a previously unseen side of Himself. Instead of the caring, compassionate Jesus that we have come to know, He appears to be gruff and insensitive to the needs of the Canaanite woman who came asking that He expel a demon from her daughter.

The woman had a couple of strikes going against her. Firstly, she was a woman alone in public aggressively asking a man for a favour. Also, she was not a Jew. She was a pagan. But she had heard about the healing powers of Jesus and she was determined to have Him help her daughter.

Initially, Jesus rebuffed her saying that His mission was directed toward the Israelites and not to people like her whom He further put down by seeming to call her a dog. But this did not deter the woman. She began verbally jousting with Him saying that: 'even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table'.

Instead of becoming discouraged, she entered into a negotiation with Him. You don't have to give me a whole meal, just some crumbs. That will be enough. You don't have to do very much, just a word or a gesture will be enough to help me. This showed the woman's great faith.

And, of course, Jesus recognizing her courage, persistence and faith, rewarded her by healing her daughter immediately. In performing this act of mercy, Jesus showed that He was sent to heal and save all people who believe in Him, not just the Jews. Jesus was inclusionary, not exclusionary. He didn't recognize any boundaries or barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles.

And this is exactly the message of the prophet Isaiah in the First Reading (Is. 56: 1, 6-7). Speaking about the non-Jews, he said: Foreigners who love the Lord and serve Him, keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's covenant will be saved. They will be brought to the holy mountain.

Isaiah was a prophet so his messages reveal the mind of God. Clearly, God does not establish boundaries that divide one group of people from another. It is we who separate ourselves along racial, religious, cultural, national, gender, and sexual orientation lines and in many other ways that cause so much strife and enmity in the world.

God does not recognize the boundaries that we establish. He loves each of His creatures and wants to save everyone. So, speaking through Isaiah, He said: 'Maintain justice, and do what is right'. We should do this. Treat everyone justly and fairly and not concern ourselves with who should be saved, whether one group is more deserving than another. Let God take care of that.

Of course, Paul's ministry was all about inclusion. He was a Pharisee but he became a great evangelizer to the Gentiles. In fact, he called himself an Apostle to the Gentiles.

In the Second Reading (Rom. 11: 13-15, 29-32), Paul seemed to be struggling with the difficulties of getting many of the Jews to accept the Good News. But rather than becoming discouraged and giving up, he saw the rejection of Jesus by the Jews as an opportunity to turn his attention to the Gentiles and to evangelize them; to bring them to Jesus.

Paul said that God, in His infinite mercy, wanted to save everyone regardless of their disobedience. God's plan of salvation keeps moving forward and plays itself out in spite of our rebellion against it at many times.

One of the ways in which we rebel against God's plan of salvation for all is by creating borders and dividing ourselves into those that we think are more deserving of being saved and those who are less deserving. We are all God's children and He wants all of us to approach Him in a simple child-like way to receive the gift of salvation. He doesn't want us to judge others who are journeying along the same path as we are but may be at a different stage of the journey.

Jesus took a pagan, Gentile woman and, after debasing her by comparing her to a dog, raised her up to a level worthy of receiving His grace; all because of her great faith. This shows us that, in spite of our sinfulness and rebelliousness, we too may be raised up, if we keep turning back to God with persistence and faith. God wants to save us all.