

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Is 56:1, 6-7](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8](#)

[Reading II: Rom 11:13-15, 29-32](#)

[Gospel: Mt 15:21-28](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082023.cfm>



The first reading is from the third portion of the book of Isaiah that addresses the people as they begin their return to Judah from the Babylonian captivity after 538 BC. During the exile in Babylon, many Jews had inter-married with non-Jews and the question arose as to whether they or other foreigners could enter or work in the Temple. The prophet declares that what is essential is expressing a relationship with God by loving God, observing the sabbath (rest on the seventh day of the week), and being part of the covenant (as expressed by the ten commandments). This message is affirmed by several other passages in the years before Jesus. This passage introduces the concept that God's mercy and forgiveness are available to all people, including Gentiles. This belief has remained a challenge within the Jewish community through the ages.

The early Christian community also struggled with this question. The Acts of the Apostles presents a resolution in the fact that God gives the Holy Spirit to Gentiles who have not become Jews. This teaching is founded upon the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt 28:19)

This principle is also shown in the Gospel when Jesus affirms the faith of the Canaanite woman. She expresses her faith in him by calling him Lord and Son of David. These are titles used by believers. Jesus, being faithful to the mission on which he has been sent, at first does not answer her and then announces that his ministry has a particular focus, "the house of Israel." Her persistence, driven by her faith, keeps her engaged. She exhibits the same orientation that the passage in Isaiah presented. She trusts God and the one whom God has sent. Jesus was working to stir up faith amongst the Jewish people. She shows the faith that Jesus was working to bring forth. She has it and Jesus responds to her faith and trust in him.

Faith is often equated with belief in ideas in contemporary society. In the biblical context, faith is connected to one's actions and relationships. Faith is expressed in deeds, how one lives and to whom one is faithful. To have faith in God, is to live in a trusting reliance upon God. One engages in an ongoing relationship with God. Is God the key relationship in your life?

The scriptures also challenge us again as to our attitude toward and exclusion of certain people. Each of us may have people with whom we are uncomfortable. It may be race, nationality, weight, tattoos, language, or occupation that puts us on the defensive. While some behavior may be offensive to us and those actions may be rightfully confronted, the dignity of each person must be respected. God has given each person life and invites them into a relationship. While we may be uncomfortable with something or even opposed to certain behaviors, a fundamental principle of Catholic Social teaching, is that God has given a dignity to each person, even if they do not recognize or accept it. Our role can be supporting someone who is searching, lovingly challenging someone whose behavior is unsafe, or

praying for someone who is in need. We are to have that openness and respect for God's life within everyone.

The Catholic Church is one of the few worldwide, universal organizations. It is operative almost everywhere in the world. The word "Catholic" means universal. The church is one body of people from every race, tongue, and location. While it has not always lived up to this ideal in accepting slavery and subjugation of native peoples, it has worked extensively in the last 70 years to speak for the powerless and promote fundamental rights.

Paul also faces some of the same issues as he writes to the Romans about why the Jews have not accepted the Gospel. If they had accepted it, then it might not have ever gotten to the Gentiles in Paul's experience. He hopes that when his Jewish contemporaries see the conversion of immoral Gentiles to a new way of life, they will become jealous and then desire the Gospel. Unfortunately, this has not happened. The sins of Christians throughout the centuries toward the Jewish community have distorted the heart of the Gospel. They can no longer tell what good the Gospel has produced. While not a Jew, Gandhi confronted Christians about this: "I like your Christ, but not your **Christianity**. ... I believe in the teachings of Christ, but you on the other side of the world do not. "I'd be a **Christian** if it were not for the **Christians**."

**Themes:**

Sickness and Suffering  
Faith

Salvation available to all  
Dignity of each person

**Reflection Questions:**

What does faith mean to you? How is it expressed?

What are some of the challenges that we face in opening ourselves to others who are different?

What are some of the ways that Christians have been an obstacle to non-Christians coming to faith in Jesus?

Have you felt welcomed by the church community? How might you help welcome others?

**Prayer Suggestions:**

For the Church: that we may be instruments of God's mercy, guides for all who are seeking God, and companions to those developing a relationship with God

For authentic trust in God: that we may call out in faith, with sincerity and conviction, to God who saves and delivers us from all our suffering and needs

For a spirit of hospitality: that our faith community may welcome all visitors as if they were Christ and that our liturgies may help them draw closer to God

For all people who have experienced prejudice: that God will heal their hearts and help them to continue to use their gifts and talents for God's glory

For countries and people who are divided by religious belief: that the Spirit of God will bring about new opportunities for understanding and cooperation