

Lectio Divina for the twentieth Sunday A in ordinary time (August 16, 2020)

Opening prayer: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . Amen Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that You read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in their life. Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May Your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of Your resurrection and witness to others that You are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace.

First Reading: A reading from the book of prophet Isaiah 56:1, 6-7: Thus says the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants— all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant, them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The word of the Lord / Thanks be to God

Commentary: Prophet Isaiah clearly proclaims the radical message that God’s blessings for all people, even foreigners and Eunuchs who were often excluded from worship and not even considered citizen in Israel. Isaiah brings out the theme of God’s universal salvation, “*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*” *Jesus quotes this exact verse when he threw the money changes out of the temple (Mark 11:17)*, God does not treat the people on the basis of race, caste or color. His Kingdom is inclusive and never exclusive. As children of universal God, we belong to one another without any discrimination.

Responsorial Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation.
R. **O God, let all the nations praise you!**

May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.
R. **O God, let all the nations praise you!**

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him!
R. **O God, let all the nations praise you!**

Explanation: Today’s responsorial Psalm (Ps 67) rejects all types of religious exclusivity and strongly instilling the theme of inclusiveness: “*Let all the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. For You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth, so that your saving power may be known among all the nations.*”

Second Reading: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans 11:13-15, 29-32: Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Commentary: St. Paul was appointed as a missionary to the Gentiles. He reminds his Jewish brethren of this fact hoping that they too would want to be saved. Speaking to the Gentile Christians, Paul warns them not to feel superior because God rejected some Jews. The Jews and the Gentiles benefit each other. Whenever God shows mercy to one group, the other shares blessing. In God's original plan, the Jews would be the source of God's blessing to the Gentiles. In Genesis 12:3, the Lord says to Abraham, the Father of Jews 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'

Gospel Reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew 5:21-28: 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 Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus' 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 Jesus 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 the woman's daughter was healed from that hour. The Gospel of the Lord/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Readings: All three readings today speak that God wills to save everyone on this earth and not the Jews alone. The Jews, because they were specially chosen by God, believed that the salvation should come first to them and then to all the people of the earth. Although the Hebrew people were chosen by God and yet He included all nations in His plan for salvation and blessed all families of the earth in Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). In the Gospel story, Jesus demonstrates that salvation is meant for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews by healing the daughter of a Gentile woman as a reward for her strong Faith.

Exegesis: The Gospels describe only two miraculous healings Jesus performed for Gentiles: the healing of the centurion's servant in Capernaum (Mt 8:10-12) and the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman which we hear today. Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman took place outside Jewish territory in Tyre and Sidon, two coastal cities (present day Lebanon). Like the Samaritans, the Canaanites were the traditional enemies of the Jews who regarded them as pagans and idolaters. The Jews don't mix with the Canaanites. This however does not discourage this Canaanite woman in her desperate need. She cries out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." She calls him with the messianic titles "Lord and Son of David". At first, he ignores her. He does not answer her at all. The more Jesus ignores her, the more the woman shouts. Even then Jesus simply ignores her, as if she did not exist. He turns a deaf ear to her pleading. But she is not discouraged by any of this. She comes and kneels before him, an act of worship, and prays simply, "Lord, help me." Jesus' answer seems quite shocking: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." The pagans were identified with the dogs. The words of Jesus seem to be very cruel and hurting.

The Jews regarded dogs as unclean, because they would eat anything given to them and the Gentiles for the Jews were no better than dogs. The woman's response is still more shocking. She does not take the words of Jesus as an insult and she knows what she wants. It looks as if she is challenging him at his words: "Oh yes, Lord, but even the dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." At least the unwanted portion of the food is available for such persons as her. With this she expresses her abounding and unlimited faith. We now see the reaction of Jesus so reassuring and consoling. He is completely won over by her strong faith and said "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." The miracle of faith takes place and her daughter was healed instantly.

Personal application of the Gospel Messages.

Be persistent in prayer: Like Canannite woman who was persistent in her petition, we need to be persistent in our prayer life because prayer moves mountains. The intercessory prayer of Abraham changed the Lord's intention of punishing the sinful people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The intercessory prayer of Moses saved the idolatrous Israelites from the wrath of God. Likewise we need to make intercessory prayers for others. Faith and Prayer are like two eyes which help us to walk without stumbling.

Be respectful and sensitive to the feelings of the other people: God's love is universal and no one is outside his purview. In our globalized culture, we encounter people of different creeds, cultures and color in our work places and neighborhood everyday. Sometimes we can be easily tempted to make hurtful comments, jokes and stories. Our words reveal who we are inside and hence we need to be very Christian while making comments on people.

Be universal: We are proud of being Catholics and we should be. This does not give us permission to judge people. The word catholic means universal. Till Vatican council II, we held on the opinion of St. Cyprian "Outside the Church there is no salvation". But the Second Vatican Council document **Nostra Aetate** (Inter Religious Dialogue) recognizes the salvific value of other religions. The Church does not reject any thing found as holy and true in these religions. Indeed the practices, lifestyle, laws and theories in these religions are different from that of what the church believes and teaches. Yet the Church looks at them with sincere respect, because in all of them there is the reflection of the rays of that truth which enlightens all (Nostra Aetate 2)

Be Inclusive: We are all children of one God irrespective of our religious beliefs and practices and therefore we need to look at everyone as our brother and sisters and accommodate them in our personal, family and religious life, respecting their faiths and practices and at the same time without compromising our Christian faith. Let us celebrate differences and learn from them if we find something good. Unity in diversity is the need of our times. Manifesting our love and respect for others is also an evangelizing ministry. The Lord invites us to be instruments of His inclusive nature to touch everyone who comes in our life either by chance or by choice.

Final Prayer: Lord Jesus, We thank You for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May Your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what Your Word has revealed to us. May the things that you have revealed and the thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us to action. As we conclude our bible study and *Lectio Divina* of this week, we call upon you to protect and guide us in your wisdom and love. Blessed Mother, the Seat of Wisdom, intercede for us to your Son that we may Love Him and Live his Eternal Truths in the Sacred Scripture. (Hail Mary...Blessing)