

Commentary to the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time



The Humility to Experience His Love

in Others The initial reaction I had to this Sunday's readings was: Huh? Here we have Paul speaking in circles to the Romans, "you 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." Huh? Then we have the incident of Jesus and the Canaanite women. She has a real need, and she cries out to him. But He refers to her people as dogs and says that he came only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Huh?

The best way to understand all this is to realize that the readings are speaking about the spread of faith. The reading from Romans refers to the many times that Paul visited various cities. When he visited a city, he preached to the Jews first. If they rejected the Gospel of Christ, Paul then preached to the gentiles. Many times the Jewish people were so inspired by the faith of the Gentiles that they took another look and opened themselves up to faith. That's why Paul says that their being closed to faith, disobedience, resulted in the gentiles receiving faith, and ultimately led to the Jews embracing the faith. In the Gospel Jesus plays the role of the fervent Jew at odds with the rest of the world. The Canaanite Woman has no claim on the gift of the Jews, but she still receives healing for her daughter. Why?

Because her faith is more powerful than her ancestry. Faith is a raging fire. It spreads from person to person. When we are exposed to a person of faith, our faith grows. As our faith grows, we ignite others with the fire of God's love. As others grow in faith, our faith increases. The Fire is the Fire of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can stop the flame. Nothing can stop the Spirit. When it comes to the Fire of Faith, the Love of God, the Holy Spirit, we have got to allow God to be God and stop putting Him in some sort of box that we have created. We can't be telling God how He should act. We can't be telling others that we have the inner knowledge of whether God is in their lives or not. I am tired of so-called Christians

claiming that Catholics are not real Christians. I am tired of Catholics claiming that other Christians really don't know Christ. I am tired of anyone who claims that God's grace and love cannot be poured forth on someone who does not claim Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Let God be God! Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit upon the world. Not just upon those people we say should receive the Holy Spirit, but upon the world. The world, includes the Hindu Mahatma Ghandi and all good and spiritual Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems and even Christians. Everything that we do, everything that has value is about the Love of God whom we have been graced to know as Jesus the Christ. The Mercy of God is infinitely greater than people's conception of His Mercy.

This all reminds me of one of the stories in the Bible about King David. David had sinned, again. This time it wasn't with a woman, like the first time with Bathsheba, the beauty he saw and stole from her husband. That was the first time David sinned. The second time was when he told his general, Joab, to count his troops. Now, you might ask, "What was wrong with that?" Well, the people of Israel were told to have faith that God would fight their battles for them. And He did. It was God who brought them out of Egypt when they had no power. It was God who defeated the nations before them when they finally arrived at the Promised Land. It was God who defeated the David's enemies and united the people under him.

When David decided to number the troops he was placing his trust in his own power instead of in God. So David sinned. He had the troops counted. Then he realized he had sinned. The prophet Gad came to David and offered him one of three punishment: Should the people suffer a horrible famine and have to depend on others for food, should they have to flee from their enemies, or should they suffer a pestilence?

David thought it out and said to himself, the first two, the famine and running from an enemy, would only be survived if other people were merciful upon him, but the third, the pestilence, would only be survived if God were merciful. David chose the pestilence, saying, "I would rather fall into the hands of the Lord for his mercy is great, than fall into the hands of men." The point is that the Mercy of God is infinitely greater, and God is infinitely greater than human beings. Human beings put others in hell if they don't fit into their nifty box that they label Christianity. Human beings decided that since the Jews were the chosen people, that Jesus shouldn't bother with that Canaanite woman. "Send her away," the disciples said. Goof-balls! Human beings decided that the gentiles couldn't become better Christians than those Christians who had been Jewish. Wrong! Human beings decided that since many Jews remain Jewish and since a vocal minority of their ancestors in Palestine had Jesus put to death, that all Jews should die, as they did throughout the centuries, particularly in the holocaust. Murderers!

That is so sad. When we shut others out of our lives due to our own inflated self worth, our own pride, we deprive ourselves of being inflamed by the fire of God they have been given by the Holy and

Merciful One. Why was Billy Graham's daughter sitting in the third row from the front at Pope John Paul II's funeral? She was there because the Vatican recognized and respected the Power of God present in the Billy Graham ministries. Jesus sees all that is good within the human heart. He saw the faith of the Canaanite woman. He sees your faith and my faith. He knows how we are trying our best to serve Him. How wonderful is that?! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He Loves us more than we love ourselves.

And so, we come to worship as a community. When we worship, we are exposed to each other's faith. We are inflamed by each other's faith. When we bring up the gifts of bread and wine in the offertory procession, we use these symbols to represent all that we have and all that we are. We offer these gifts to God, and He transforms them into the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Eternal Sacrifice of Love. At the Offertory, we unite all our faith into one big ball of Holy Flame and give it to God, who inflames us with an even greater, an infinitely greater Love.

"Throw fire!" That is what we have been called to do. We are called to throw the fire of God's love upon the world. We have also been called to allow ourselves to be exposed to the fire of God's love in others. We trust in God whose mercy and compassion is greater than we can even imagine. May we have the humility to experience His Love in others.

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