

Homily for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 15-16, 2020

Readings: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Mt 15:21-28

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Two lines struck a chord with me as I reflected on our readings. The first was, “Maintain justice and do what is right.” Isaiah is urging the Israelites to be sure everyone had all that was needed to thrive. To live a fully human life. For that is the meaning of “justice” in the Scriptures.

So what's going on with Jesus? Ignoring, then insulting the Canaanite woman? Refusing to help a child in need of healing? After recently healing many people, and feeding the multitudes? This encounter doesn't fit our image of Jesus, does it? Could it be that he really believes his mission is exclusively for his own people? But he has entered Gentile territory here, for whatever reason. And obviously, his reputation has preceded him.

We don't know what Jesus was thinking. What we do know is that he changed his tune, healing the woman's daughter, after all. Was this crumbling of barriers a Spirit led conversion? In breaking with tradition, Jesus anticipates the mission to the Gentiles. That includes us.

The message here, as in all of our readings today, is one of radical inclusion. Isaiah tells of the acceptance of foreigners. Of their offerings and sacrifices being valued. God says, “I will make them joyful in my house of prayer...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” And Paul speaks of his ministry to the Gentiles. His hope that God's mercy, shown to them, will also be received by his own people, the Jews.

Which brings me to the psalm, the second line that struck me. “Let the peoples praise you, O Lord, let all the peoples praise you!” What a perfect response to the message of our readings! We can well imagine the Canaanite woman and the foreigners whose offerings were found acceptable singing God's praises.

But what about us? In the midst of pandemic fatigue, of income inequality and jobs lost, of climate change, racism and increasing injustices, we may

not always feel like praising God. Yet, when we stop to think about it, there is much still to be grateful for. A cool breeze on a hot day. A meal delivered when someone is sick. The love and innocence of a little child. The bravery of folks who risk criticism or worse to do or say what is right.

The medieval mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, said to speak our truth is to praise God. The late John Lewis spent his life praising God that way. Speaking truth to power. Fighting injustice wherever he saw it. Yet never losing his inner joy, his faith, despite paying the price for his life's work.

Maintain justice and do what is right. Work to bring fullness of life for all peoples. John Lewis lived that biblical admonition. "In my life," he said, "I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way...we have a moral obligation to stand up, to speak up and to speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something, you must do something."

We know there is much that is not right these days, don't we? Increasing homelessness and hunger. Mistreatment of asylum seekers, many of whom have died in substandard prison conditions. Climate change. Systemic racism. How shall we model the radical inclusivity of our God? If we have the intelligence to put astronauts in a space station, we can find solutions. All that is lacking, then, is our will.

Maintain justice and do what is right. We are also called to live that biblical admonition. We cannot all be John Lewis. However, all of us can speak up. Speak out. Do something. Maybe it's just as simple as a letter to the editor. A phone call to Congress. Signing justice petitions. Participating in a peaceful protest. Welcoming a foreigner to the neighborhood. Volunteering.

We need to find our truth. And speak it! Then we will be praising God with all our being!

