

**August 20, 2023**  
**Cycle A – 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

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

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

**Notes from Bishop Peter**

1. Let's begin with the Gospel. Jesus is tired of being badgered by his adversaries, the Pharisees and Scribes, so he leads his Apostles beyond the limits of Galilee to what is today Lebanon.
  - a. This passage is one of the most difficult in the New Testament. First, in Matthew's Gospel, it is the first time Jesus goes to a pagan land. There he is confronted by a woman whose daughter is being tormented by a demon. When she begs Jesus to cure her daughter, he tells her that he has been sent ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Even upon hearing this, the woman begs Jesus again to help her. Jesus says, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." To her credit, the woman comes right back at him with respect: "Please, Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the tables of the masters." Then Jesus, struck by her perseverance and FAITH in him says, "Let it be done as you wish. Matthew tells us that the woman's daughter was healed from that hour."
  - b. We admire as Jesus did, the faith and perseverance of this pagan woman. Most likely Jesus didn't expect to find such faith beyond his own borders. It's the only time I can think of that Jesus loses a debate.
  - c. We are shocked, however, by his harsh words to her. Actually no one has ever come up with an explanation of why he responded like this. Was he testing her? Was he tired? Some scholars argue that he was struggling with his mission. Yes, he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel but was he called by his Father to go to the pagans? Jesus did cure the servant of the centurion who was a Roman pagan but that was within his country.
  - d. In fact, in Galilee, Jesus had to interact with foreigners when he worked as a carpenter. Father Virgil Elizondo writes interestingly of

Galilee's inhabitants: "They were mostly poor, rural peasants exploited by distant landowners and even Temple officials, some of whom considered them backward, impure, rebellious, and ignorant... While Jewish by population, Galilee was a land of regular, often tense cultural encounters and exchanges of locals with occupying foreigners and/or non-Jewish neighbors; villagers met and interacted with diverse others under difficult circumstances."

- e. He further asserts that Jesus, being from Galilee, was of mixed blood himself, through Mary, and thus had the outreach to the gentiles in his DNA, so to speak.
- f. This culminates at the end of Matthew's Gospel when, after Jesus is raised from the dead, he tells his Apostles to announce the Good News and baptize persons from all nations AND THAT HE WOULD BE WITH THEM TO THE END OF THE AGES.

## 2. What can we draw from this?

- a. Jesus trusts us to let him work through us to touch others – by our prayer, our faith in him and by the way we live. How many people have been touched by laypersons who really believe in Jesus and who live accordingly?
- b. The word "Catholic" comes from Greek: *kata holos* = Here comes everybody. (James Joyce wrote this in *Finnegan's Wake*.) Thus openness to all people since Jesus identifies with each and every human being. Respect, respect, respect – comes from Latin = to look at, and I would add, with awe.
- c. How do we interact with people who are of diverse backgrounds, ethnic groups, races or religious beliefs including recent immigrants? With persons of the LGBTQ community? Do we ever experience the temptation to place ourselves above others so we can look down on them so as to feel superior?
- d. The importance of a diverse education for the young – having children and young adults of differing backgrounds in the same classrooms, parishes? The grace given to young people who spend time in other countries such as a junior year in another land...

3. Eucharist: It is Jesus who loves each human being and who calls us to struggle to do the same, no matter what the cost.

Amen.