

**Finding faith in unexpected people – “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” (Isaiah 56:1,6-7, Romans 11:13-15,29-32, Matthew 15:21-28) 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year A, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020.**

Each and every one of us has equal opportunity of the mercy of God but one of the issues confronting us today is our attitude towards those who are different from us either because of their cultural, ethnic or religious background. We have a universal prejudice in which we tend to distrust outsiders. Matthew’s gospel written for the Jews would describe Jesus as a true Jew who like his Jewish brothers would call those who were not of the Jewish faith as “Gentiles” or “Pagans.” Jesus himself was confronted with the problem of foreigners and it seems he needed time to deal with this issue. So, when sending out the disciples, Jesus instructed them to avoid the Gentiles and preach only to the ‘lost sheep’ of Israel. (Matt 10:6)

Our 1<sup>st</sup> reading is from “third” Isaiah which was compiled after the exile to give hope and to show the returning exiles that God will reveal his salvation to all. Before they went into exile and before coming into contact with other peoples, the Israelites were not “Catholic”, that is they were not open to others but closed in upon themselves. Isaiah tells the exiled people that, there will be a time when the Lord will be the one God and Father of all. He says, “And the foreigners who join you to worship the Lord...their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.”(Isaiah 56:7) Our responsorial Psalm also adds that, “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.”

In our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, Paul declares that he has been made apostle to the gentiles. Paul is convinced that salvation is not for the privilege few or for being a

member of a certain group, but for one who accepts Jesus through faith. Paul says that though God's call of the Jews is irrevocable, but pagans are also brought to faith in Jesus Christ. The mission to all nations is already shown when the Magi visited the new-born child in the manger. Later the risen Jesus would command, "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations." (Matt 28:19).

In today's gospel, Jesus crosses boundaries to the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon and a Canaanite woman (an outsider) comes to him requesting that he heals her daughter tormented by demons. At first Jesus ignores her; he says nothing. The disciples asked Jesus to send her away just as they asked Jesus to send away the crowds before the feeding of the 5000. Jesus actually wanted to evangelise the Canaanite woman by entering into a personal discussion with her. He tells them he was sent to minister to the Jews alone. Jesus's first words to this woman sound so discouraging; "it is not good to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." To call a person a dog was an insult because the word dog "kunaria" was used by the Jews for Gentiles and Pagans.

The Canaanite woman who met Jesus would not take "No" for an answer in spite of Jesus' harsh and discouraging words. She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table." This moved Jesus because he found faith in an unexpected person. This Woman's faith should inspire us not to give up. Maybe your daughter or son or grandchild is struggling with her faith or with a serious illness, but you can't fix the situation, and you don't know how to help. Bring your needs to Jesus as this woman did. Don't let other people's pessimism bring you down; push through every doubting thought and exercise your extreme faith. May our resolve this week be to treat everyone with love while admitting that we are all different. **By Fr. Emmanuel Subaar**