

HOMILY ON 20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - 16 AUGUST 2020

Our God is the God of All Peoples: "O God, let all the nations praise you!" (Psalm 67: 4).

Dear brothers and sisters,
Last week we dwelled on the theme, Being the Beneficiaries of God's Kindness and Salvation. We concluded that every man and woman is heir to God's salvation and goodness. Nobody on earth is excluded. It stands to reason that God is the God of all. Christianity is not a private religion or a religion for the closet. It is a universal religion. The Lord says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).

However, it appears in the gospel that our Lord is telling the Canaanite woman that she does not belong, saying "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Earlier in the same gospel, while sending the Twelve on their evangelistic mission, he told them. "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). What is really going on here? Did the Lord actually say those things? Let us examine this seeming paradox. Our Lord made explicit what is in the heart of the first Jewish Christians: to teach them the nature of his kingdom. He voiced their views of the gentiles to teach them that it is not right to hold such views. They are chosen to be the avenue of God's blessing to others. They are not reservoirs to keep

the blessings to themselves. They are running streams and not a lake or a dead sea. The Lord came not for the self-righteous but to call sinners (Luke 5:32, Mark 2:17, Matthew 9:13). He would teach this pointedly to Peter. "Thou shalt not call unclean, what God has made clean" (Acts 10:15).

Through the passage about the Canaanite woman, the Lord was leading the Apostles step by step to where he wanted them to be. He was leading them to realize that all peoples are his people. As he always does, the Lord was using the pedagogical principle of leading them from the known to the unknown. A child learns arithmetic and geometry before he goes into calculus and geometric progression. The Lord had begun the three year formation process with them. At the end of the three years, he would give them the great commission to all of creation. "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The woman mentioned in the gospel is a Canaanite woman. How did a typical ancient Jew view the Canaanites? The gentiles, especially the Canaanites, were regarded as accursed and sinful. Jews do not associate with them.

The Lord does not want his children to practice segregation or discrimination. Do you agree with me that everything our Lord does always teaches and is always for our salvation? Speaking to the Canaanite woman the way he did brought the attention of his disciples to the endemic racism and prejudices in their hearts so that they could be expunged. Otherwise, if left unaddressed, these feelings could constitute obstacles to their vocation of bringing the

good news to all nations. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 19:19-20). Last, but not the least, we see in the words of the Lord to that woman a classic use of irony. The Lord said, "It is not right to throw food for children to the dogs. But at the end of the day our Lord not only healed the woman's daughter, he praised her faith: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish" (Matthew 15:27).

Can we say in conscience and truth that Christianity sanctions prejudice or discrimination? No. One only needs to look at other passages in the Bible to see the whole picture and understand these passages in context. For example, the responsorial Psalms acknowledging that God reigns from sea to sea utters this incredible Catholic prayer, "O God, let all the nations praise you!" (Psalm 67:4). The First reading nailed it conclusively. 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 (Isaiah 56:6-7). In other words, the temple is not only for the Jews but also for the gentiles. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

St Augustine, the Doctor of grace put clearly the tradition of the Church on the matter, he wrote,

In the Lord's garden are to be found not only the roses of his martyrs. In it there are also lilies of the virgins, the ivy of wedded couples, and the violets of widows. On no account may any class of people despair, thinking that God has not called them. Christ suffered for all. What the Scriptures say of him is true: He desires all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

When you feel tempted to think that you do not belong or that someone else does not belong, remember that we all belong. If God includes you, no one can exclude you. God is the God of every man and woman. Our God is the God of All Nations!