

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Is 56:1, 6-7

Thus says the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed.

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; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

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

R. (4) O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us. So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity; the nations on the earth you guide.

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you! May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

Reading II, Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but 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. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Gospel, Mt 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus' disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." When Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour.

The readings today raise the question about insiders and outsiders, particularly of our Christian communities. It is one thing to define membership in a group. It is another thing entirely when the definition defines acceptability that may harm or exclude “the foreigners”, “the other” in our lives. Are we inclusive or exclusive? Isaiah spoke of a time when outsiders would join insiders in worshipping God. The Lord said His *“house shall be called a house of Prayer for all peoples”* who love the name of the Lord. In the Gospel, Jesus broke out of His Jewish cultural and religious identity that limited Him. He blessed the persistent and faith-filled Canaanite woman whose very gender, whose history of being a prime enemy of Israel, and whose pagan religion made her a very unsuitable outsider. Who of us would have persistently pleaded with Jesus as she did? But Christ responded to her faith, and made her an insider. He directs us to take the same action, to be inclusive, not exclusive. Our cultural and religious biases must never stand in the way of God’s grace. When Pope Francis prayed recently with Christians, Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem, calling them “dear brothers”, he showed us that in the unity of mankind there are no outsiders....God loves us all, no matter how diverse we are...His plan of mercy and salvation is for everyone.

I believe, we here at St. Brendan’s are addressing the issue of insider and outsider as Jesus has challenged us to do. We are working hard not to build barriers that marginalize people because of our cultural or Catholic biases. In fact our outreach ministries like Local Charities, the Our Family Project, HaitiReach and Father Juan’s mission trips demonstrate that we don’t want anyone to miss an opportunity to experience God’s mercy and grace. We don’t ask, “Are you Catholic? We ask, “How we can help?”

I’m curious, how many of you have been to a foreign country? How many of you have friends in a foreign country? Actually that was a trick question...everyone here at St. Brendan’s has friends in Bassin-Zim, Haiti. Haiti may be a foreign country, but our friends there are insiders with us, not outsiders.

Last week, Father Meres, pastor of our sister parish, Our Lady of Fatima in Bassin-Zim, Haiti, encouraged us to continue the good work of getting more and more people involved in bridging the gap between our two communities in Georgia and Haiti. Father Meres was excited to tell us about the 176 children now attending the new school and how well they are doing. All the students passed the state exam for their grade...3 ranked in the national exam standings. These results are extraordinary when you consider that 6 years ago they had not yet broke ground on the Our Lady of Fatima Parish Hall where classes would be held, and the school was Father Meres distant dream. But, I have to tell you, none of this has come easily. Joan Murphy, the leader of the HaitiReach Ministry, told me how she learned to cope with the many roadblocks that appear in the activities being done. On one of her several trips she took a picture of a Haitian girl that she uses as her cell phone wallpaper. Whenever she uses her phone, but especially when she is frustrated, these big eyes stare at her, right into her soul. Joan says, "How can I deny that child anything? She keeps me grounded and refocused on what HaitiReach is all about. It's how I get the strength to continue." If you want a firsthand experience of God's mercy and grace, I invite you to come on the trip to Haiti this November...we have slots for one or two additional people to make this trip, but you need to sign up and get your shots as soon as possible.

Brothers and sisters of St Brendan's we are taking to heart today's readings. We are coming to know that the unity of mankind means that there are no outsiders.... God loves us all, no matter how diverse we are...

Let me give you another example of how we have been making a difference promoting dignity and competence and participation of people who many times think they are outsiders right here in Forsyth County. Since 2005 the Our Family program has been educating and mentoring Latino women and their families. This year we have 40 students supported by 60 volunteers. Our Family has made a huge impact on hundreds of people's

lives right here in our community. And, guess what Bill Kelly, one of this ministry's leaders, said they are most concerned about? Many people, especially Hispanics, are leaving the Catholic Church because other denominations offer them more help when it is needed. The ministry is constantly challenging themselves: "What are the barriers that prevent people quickly feeling a part of our community? Are we welcoming when people approach St. Bendan's? In fact, are we really inviting people to come when they need help?" The Our Family ministry wants to make improvements to a great program so no one will miss the opportunity to experience God's mercy and grace.

Brother and Sisters, we need to make sure we are breaking down barriers that keep people outside, not building them around our church, or in fact our ministries. We need to Go, Baptize and Teach, to invite 1-by-1 the poor and people in need who think they are outsiders, and not just react to them when they approach us. We need to be praying together with them, and listening, and acting on the answers we hear, so no one will miss the opportunity to experience God's mercy and grace. Jesus is challenging you and I to make it happen.