

Cycle A 20th 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 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." Then 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 in our Christian communities. They make clear that with Jesus there are no outsiders. It is one thing to define membership in a group. It is another thing entirely when that definition defines acceptability that may harm or exclude “the foreigner”, “the other” in our lives. We must ask ourselves, are we inclusive or exclusive? Are we always working for justice?

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.*” In the Gospel, Christ was acting like a normal first century Jew...like His disciples acted towards Gentiles. He had rebuked the mother’s requests...He called her a “dog!” Jesus then broke out of His Jewish cultural and religious identity that limited Him...He broke the mold and healed the daughter of the faith-filled Canaanite mother whose very gender, whose country’s history of being an enemy of Israel, and whose pagan religion made her a very unsuitable outsider. Jesus responded to her faith-filled pleading and made her an insider in order to reveal God’s justice to His disciples, and importantly, to us.

Jesus directs us to take the same action, to be inclusive, not exclusive....to work for justice. Our cultural and religious biases must never stand in the way of God’s grace. When Pope Francis prayed with Christians, Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 2014, 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 invitation of mercy, forgiveness and salvation is for everyone.

Let me share an experience of how we can make a difference serving God by standing in solidarity with people in our community who many think are outsiders. For nearly 10 years I was involved in Family Promise in Forsyth County, a faith-based organization of 20 congregations and hundreds of volunteers serving homeless families. If you can imagine, today over 800 students in Forsyth County schools are identified as homeless! Most are living in unstable multi-family environments. I came to know fellow ministers from dozens of congregations...including a Synagogue, the Latter-Day Saints, two Mosques, two Hindu Temples and many Christian denominations of every persuasion. By far, most of the ministers I worked with knew how important outreach ministry was for their congregations to thrive and grow in faith. One Pastor said, “*it may be counterintuitive, but you have to give away the love*

of God to fully receive His love.” Unfortunately, I also met a couple of ministers who weren’t ready to be inclusive. They didn’t mind serving “the other” of different faiths as clients on their terms, but they were not yet ready to serve side-by-side as volunteers with them.

So, what should we be most concerned about? Pope Leo XIV suggests we need to address a new industrial revolution that’s causing momentous changes in the world. He said we are *“facing a choice: to construct a new Tower of Babel or build the city where God and humanity dwell together.”* I’ve said it before; we have a top and bottom problem of a widening gap between the richest and poorest segments of society. While economic growth and technology progress have lifted millions out of poverty, these forces are extremely benefiting the wealthy, leaving too many behind. Pope Leo notes that *“our world is filled with attempts to seize control of markets and influence, often shrouded in reassuring rhetoric and seductive ideologies...* While today’s ideologies *“urge humanity to overcome limitations through technology...and to rise above others by asserting dominance, Jesus offers something quite different: He takes upon Himself our weakness and transforms it into a setting for Justice, Peace and Salvation...”*

Candidly, we know Roswell GA is a great place to live and St. Andrew is a beacon of hope for our community, so we ask what’s the problem? Well, each of us could easily list what concerns us most like health of a loved one, living pay-check-to-paycheck while the cost-of-living skyrockets, loneliness, effects of aging, to name a few. We should recognize that our St Andrew parish knows what is affecting us and our neighbors because of the people who come here seeking help. Many are exposing uncomfortable truths and situations that challenge us to face the ungodly moral issues in our public places, and may even expose our bias and ways we fail to give a What-Would-Jesus-Do response. We are starting to recognize people’s jobs in every industry are being drastically changed by Artificial Intelligence and robotics for the benefit of a few dominating people and companies. No one is untouched. We see the disruption over the last few years of family members, friends and many students whose jobs, careers and lives have been upended by the AI revolution. AI Data centers are overwhelming electricity and water resources of communities throughout Georgia. We in Roswell GA are being wounded by these momentous changes. So what are we at St. Andrew called to do?

Pope Leo XIV has given us some demanding insights on how to handle our concerns in his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, meaning Magnificent Humanity. He proposes *"a sober, yet demanding way of Christian life embracing the Gospel so we can navigate the momentous changes driven by AI."* As Catholics we are united in Eucharist, he said, *"...as the Body of Christ completing God's work of creation by living out the Gospel in our local communities."* This is both a challenge and a remedy for our new existence. We should not despair, however, because we are not alone.

What always saves humanity, according to Leo, is *"the divine love that descends into the most fragile points of our history and renews it from within."* In Eucharist, *"the Lord gives Himself and gathers the Church together, so that His love becomes the source of unity and life..."* In Eucharist, we *"are the Church of Christ, his members, his body."* Everyone is brother and sister in Him. As a result, *"...Eucharist opens us to justice and sharing, with a preferential concern for those at the bottom who are burdened by poverty or marginalized"* by somebody's dominance.

"While our new existence and AI technology can generate exclusion, isolation and dependencies," reports Leo, *"the Church, nourished by Eucharist, offers a different model: one that preserves human connections, gives a voice to the invisible and ensures that solutions are aimed at respecting people's dignity."*

Those of us who think that our Catholic faith became less demanding after the Second Vatican Council may not have been listening. The Eucharistic spirituality being renewed by Pope Leo is sober and demanding because it rejects the ideologies of power and wealth in favor of the Gospel message that is open to all. The justice-centered way of life being proposed is a challenge to us who gather here to be transformed by Jesus with His Word and Eucharist. What we do here is not simply for our own piety or salvation! Rather, what we do is to BE the Body of Christ, building the Kingdom of God...God's Kingdom of mercy, forgiveness and salvation, His Kingdom of justice, peace and love that is open to all...right here in Roswell GA.

Pope Leo XIV stresses that we can't be just *"observing from afar and hoping for the best."* Our Christian vocations are *"not to be passive spectators judging social and cultural fractures, nor*

mere commentators complaining about what is crumbling. No, we are to be men and women, girls and boys “*prepared to participate in the construction sites of history.*”

So what should we do to work for justice? I do know each of us must somehow experience our active vocation out in the world. Pope Leo encourages us that a world wounded by momentous changes, wounded by hatred, violence, and injustice needs to experience God’s love through us...All of us! each one of us! There are no outsiders!

The rest is up to us...please, think about it...what are you passionate about?...We’re going to figure this out...Let’s talk, because we have the power to imagine something better...for everyone... right here in Roswell GA!

And the Church says, AMEN!

Please let me take another minute to share something else. In 2018 I wrote a book to my grandchildren Phoebe, Amedeo and Damiano to share with them my faith in Jesus. I called it GOD IN OUR LIVES, Grandpa’s Stories, Grandpa’s Love.

Well, this coming Wednesday I’m turning 80 so I thought it was time for an update. I wrote a new book called GOD IN OUR LIVES, Grandpa’s Stories at St. Andrew, Grandpa’s Love. I included 47 homilies that I have preached here over the last 5 years. I only printed 50 copies of the book, this one is for Fr. Juan, but I do want you to have a copy as well. So, my son Christopher helped me create a web page, deaconrogerfraser.com, where you can read and save the eBook version of both books...and view 28 videos of the Masses when I preached... and read 8 Travelogues I wrote...and hear Grandpa’s Playlist of my favorite 130 songs. If you are so inclined, you can visit my website deaconrogerfraser.com anytime.

I hope it helps you tell your stories of God in Your Life.