

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE A

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

(An unlit candle, a bible open to this week's gospel and flowers from the gardens of one or more members are arranged on a table in the gathering place.)

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and the leader invites members to begin with the sign of the cross.)

All: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Members join in singing "Open My Eyes;" available on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: 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.

All: O God, let all the nations praise you!

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

All: O God, let all the nations praise you!

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

All: O God, let all the nations praise you!

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

COMMENTARY

This week's gospel passage may be one of the most revealing passages in Scripture about the humanity of Jesus. He seems harsh in his dealings with the woman because she is not Jewish. But she had the strength of faith to not be deflected in her quest for healing for her daughter. In the end, Jesus was moved by the persistence of her faith, even though her faith did not have its roots in Judaism.

Persistence is something that is often missing in American life today. If we can't use quick fixes to solve problems, we often throw up our hands and walk away. We pray in a time of crisis when things are tough. But how deep and regular is our prayer? How much is it part of the rhythm of our lives?

Many of us are not ready to make changes in our life styles to make the world a better place in the future. Take a look at our behaviors as consumers and in the world of politics on issues of the environment, the economy and international relations.

Prayer doesn't always result in what we ask for. Too often, we are into immediate gratification rather than focusing on the long term possibilities and solutions. But if we persist in prayer, we can see more clearly what God wants for us and what is best for us. Persistence in prayer helps us to see that what we need most is not that God does what we want. What we need most is to live in the peace and the harmony that comes from being in harmony with God's will for us. When we want for us what God wants for us, our persistence in prayer will lead us to the light.

When we take the three readings for this week together, we see that what God most wants is to extend his mercy to all people. Embracing God's inclusiveness is the pathway to the peace and harmony we desire.

Jesus' own horizon is expanded as he accepts the Canaanite woman and responds to her plea. Our own horizons often need to be broadened and our behavior changed to build a merciful world that receives, accommodates and accepts all.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ When have you persisted in the pursuit of some need or value in the face of negativity from those around you? With what result?
- ◆ What do you do when your prayers seem not to be answered?
- ◆ Mention a time when you asked God for something but ultimately saw that God's will was something other than yours.
- ◆ How deep and regular is your prayer? How much is it a part of the rhythm of your life?
- ◆ What might have to change in you, in the way you live, to help build a more merciful world, a world that receives, accommodates and accepts all?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ When shopping for back to school clothes or clothes for yourself this fall, avoid the major labels. Give the money you save to a children's hospital or a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Assess the quality of persistence in your own prayer.
- ◆ Join a prayer tree in your parish. If there isn't one, talk to some fellow parishioners and your pastor about starting one.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader calls the community to an extended time of silent prayer. After several minutes, the leader continues as follows.)

Leader: Sisters, brothers, the Canaanite woman shows us the result of persistence in prayer animated by faith. Let us put all of our faith in God in the prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition we now offer.

(Members offer prayers as they will. To each prayer, the community responds, "Lord, hear our prayer; deepen our faith and strengthen us." When the prayers are complete, a member prays as follows.)

Member: God, our creator, thank you for hearing us as we gather in your name. Thank you for the gift of your Son in whose name we pray in the one Spirit.

All: Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

