Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
20th Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

As I study Jean-Germain Drouais' 18th century painting, "Jesus and the Canaanite Mother," *what first comes to mind as this non-Jewish mom pleads healing for her "possessed" daughter? What does the "action" of Jesus' right hand say to me? What do I notice in the background?*

Opening Prayer

Open My Heart
Risen Christ,
open my heart... my faith... and my hope...
to *all* peoples of the world...
no matter how much we differ socially...
and language-wise...
no matter our different understandings...
of divinity and humanity.
Let me embrace them all.
Remove from my heart, I pray...
any trace of superiority... or privilege.
Amen

Source: Adapted from a reflection by Brother Alois of the Taizé Community.

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7 "Do what's right and do it in the right way, for salvation is just around the corner."

Psalm 67: 2-8 "The whole country will see how you work, all the godless nations see how you save."

Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32 "There was a time not so long ago when you were on the outs with God."

Matthew 15: 21-28 "A Canaanite woman came down from the hills and pleaded, 'Mercy, Master, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly afflicted by an evil spirit.'"

Introduction to the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time

The dominant theme of this week's readings is *inclusiveness.*

Unlike his fellow Jews for generations past, Jesus considered no one as "other." He made that clear in this week's reading from the fifteenth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel. As Jesus passed through the pagan territories of Tyre and Sidon, a woman fell to her knees blocking his path. Believing that this Jesus of Nazareth had special powers, she begged him to heal her "demon-possessed" daughter. As you see in Drouet's depiction, even Jesus' apostles wanted him to ignore her, but that wasn't the Lord's way. It's hard for us to pinpoint the meaning of "possession" in this mother's experience. She just knew her child "wasn't right in the head." She had convinced herself that only this man, though a Jew, could "fix" her daughter.

During the Jews captivity in Babylon (5th c. BC/BCE), there must have been some intermarriage between them and the pagan population. In Isaiah 56, the prophet spoke of "outsiders who now follow me [Yahweh], working for me, loving my name, and wanting to be my servants." It helps us to know that these words came not from the original Prophet Isaiah but from an anonymous "Third Isaiah," who wrote shortly after the Babylonian exile ended. The author referred to those Babylonians who had accepted Yahweh as their God and chosen Judaism as their way of life and worship.

Irish novelist and poet, James Joyce (1882-1941) once described the Catholic Church—and by extension—all Christian denominations in these words, "Here comes everybody!" As we survey the Christian landscape today in all its expressions, can we honestly say about *our own* houses of worship that "*all* are welcome in this place," even the *seekers*... the *searchers*… and the many *not-yet-believers*?

Reading from the Book of Isaiah (56: 1, 6-7)

"God's Message: 'Guard my common good. Do what's right and do it in the right way, for salvation is just around the corner, my setting-things-right is about to go into action.' ...

"'And as for the outsiders who now follow me, working for me, loving my name,

and wanting to be my servants—all who keep Sabbath and don't defile it, holding fast to my covenant—I'll bring them to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.'"

Personal Reflection

Many present-day Christians think of ancient Israel as a closed, Jews only, religious society. This post-exilic "Isaiah" risked charges of blasphemy by saying Yahweh's love is all-inclusive.

Some of us Christians may still think of our own denomination and our sacraments as gifts to be kept private and closely guarded—exclusively for ourselves. Will we ever accept the *real*, *all-inclusive God...* and let go of our false understandings of divine love?

— *How is my parish community living up to the hymn we sometimes sing: "All are welcome in this place"? How welcoming am I to strangers who come to worship at my local church? How do I express that welcome?*

Psalm 67 (2-8)

Thanksgiving to a grateful God

O God, let all the nations praise you.

God, mark us with grace and blessing!
Smile! The whole country will see how you work,
all the godless nations see how you save.
O God, let all the nations praise you.

Let all far-flung people become happy
and shout their happiness because
you judge them fair and square...
you tend the far-flung peoples.
O God, let all the nations praise you.

Let all people thank and enjoy you.
Earth, display your exuberance!
You mark us with blessing, O God, our God.
Earth's four corners—honor him!
O God, let all the nations praise you.

Personal Reflection

The occasion of this joyful song is a successful harvest, but the psalmist rose above selfish considerations. The triumph of a good harvest or industrial prosperity should make us think of places where the harvest failed and people suffered as a result. Yahweh is the same in both circumstances. And both well-fed and hungry

people share the image of God, who rules the world with justice for all. Our calling is to follow the model Yahweh set for us.

— *After reading this psalm slowly, line by line, in what ways do I identify with the psalmist's relationship with Yahweh? How do I differ?*

From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (11: 13-15, 29-32)

"I don't want to go on about [the unconverted Jews]. It's you, the outsiders, that I'm concerned with now. Because my personal assignment is focused on the so-called outsiders, I make as much of this as I can when I'm among my Israelite kin, the so-called *insiders*, hoping they'll realize what they're missing and want to get in on what God is doing. If their falling out initiated this worldwide coming together, their recovery is going to set off something even better: a mass homecoming! If the first thing the Jews did, even though it was wrong for them, turned out for your good, just think what's going to happen when they get it right! ....

"From your point of view as you hear and embrace the good news of the Message, it looks like the Jews are God's enemies. But looked at from the long-range perspective of God's overall purpose, they remain God's oldest friends. God's gifts and God's call are under full warranty—never canceled, never rescinded.

"There was a time not so long ago when you were on the outs with God. But then the Jews slammed the door on him and things opened up for you. Now *they* are on the outs. But with the door held wide open for you, they have a way back in. In one way or another, God makes sure that we all experience what it means to be outside so that he can personally open the door and welcome us back in."

Personal Reflection

By the time St. Paul wrote this letter to the new and mixed community at Rome, he was all too aware that his ministry to the Jewish people in their synagogues throughout the empire had resulted in far fewer conversions than he expected. He must have wrestled with this issue since his own sudden conversion on the road to Damascus. As a matter of fact, he suffered more floggings, stoning, and expulsions at the hands of his fellow Jews than from any pagan authorities!

— *If I have never suffered discrimination for my faith, how might that indicate that I've kept my beliefs pretty much to myself in order to "fit in" with those who do not share my faith? Or what other reasons might there be?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (15: 21-28)

"Jesus took a trip to Tyre and Sidon. They had hardly arrived when a Canaanite woman came down from the hills and pleaded, 'Mercy, Master, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly afflicted by an evil spirit.'

"Jesus ignored her. The disciples came and complained, 'Now she's bothering *us*. Would you please take care of her? She's driving us crazy.'

"Jesus refused, telling them, 'I've got my hands full dealing with the lost sheep of Israel.'

"Then the woman came back to Jesus, dropped to her knees, and begged, 'Master, help me.'

"He said, 'It's not right to take bread out of children's mouths and throw it to dogs.'

"She was quick to respond. 'You're right, Master, but beggar dogs do get scraps from the master's table.'

"Jesus gave in. 'Oh, woman, your faith is something else. What you want is what you get!' Right then her daughter became well."

Personal Reflection

In this gospel reading, Jesus is on foreign soil among pagan peoples in Phoenician territory. According to 4th century scholar and bishop Saint Remigius, "Tyre and Sidon were Gentile towns, for Tyre was the metropolis of Canaan... and Sidon marked the boundary to the north."

A non-Jewish woman responded to her inner instinct and dared to approach Jesus with a petition that burned in her heart. Jesus hesitated as he pondered how to respond to the woman's insistent plea. After testing her conviction, he could not deny this terrified mother's faith in him. So, despite their cultural and religious differences, he relented and healed her daughter, saying, "Woman, how great is your faith!"

One of the paradoxes surrounding *all* of Jesus' miracles is their myriad circumstances and "methods." Some happened with him barely noticing, e.g., touching the hem of his clothing (Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, and Luke 8:43-48). In other cases, without his physical presence at all (healing a centurion's servant in Matthew 8: 5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10). In this woman's case, he seemed to need conviction of her faith in him.

— *What is Jesus doing in this tense encounter that seems out of character or "un-Christlike"? How do I explain this to myself... and to others?*

For Inspirational Watching and Listening

Watch

"Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman" by Incredible Journey

Listen

Hymn of St. Francis Assisi: A Feast Day Hymn Of Simplicity & Peace
by Voice of Grace

"He Did It Again and Again" by NA Inspirationals (sung by Naomi Allen)

All are Welcome by Marty Haugen

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 22: 19-23 "Eliakam... will be a father-leader to Jerusalem and the government of Judah."
Psalm 138: 1-3, 6, 8 "I kneel in worship facing your holy temple and say it again: 'Thank you!'"
Romans 11: 33-36 "Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom?"
Matthew 16: 13-20 " When Jesus arrived in the villages of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?'"

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

Lord,
make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred... let me sow *love*;
where there is injury... *pardon*;
where there is doubt... *faith*;
where there is despair... *hope*;
where there is darkness... *light*;
where there is sadness... *joy*.
O divine Master... grant that I may not so much seek...
to be consoled... as to *console*...
to be understood... as to *understand*...
to be loved... as to *love*.
For it is in *giving*... that we receive...
it is in *pardoning*... that we are pardoned...
and it is in *dying*... that we are born to eternal life.

Source: St. Francis of Assisi

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.
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