



Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time † Sunday 20th August 2017

In England and Wales Cycle of Prayer:

For strangers, foreigners, seafarers and travellers

Keynote: All nations called to recognise the one God

Prophet Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

'Have a care for justice, act with integrity,' says the Lord God, *'for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifest.'* So the prophet announces the call from God to his people. The invitation is set in Palestine at a time after the return of the people of Israel from their exile in Babylon. What is significant is that outsiders and even people from other nations are invited too: *'Foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord to serve him and to love his name and be his servants – all who observe the Sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to the covenant – these will I bring to my holy mountain... for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.'* The universal call to holiness runs throughout these readings.

Responsorial Psalm 66 [67] – A universal song of thanksgiving to God

Letter of Paul to the Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Last week, the apostle lamented that many of his own Jewish kinsman, *'his own flesh and blood'*, did not share his faith in Jesus Christ. Now he addresses the pagans, *'Let me tell you pagans this: I have been sent to the pagans as their apostle, and I am proud of being sent.'* However, Paul also hopes this will make his own people jealous, *'but the purpose of it... is in this way to save some of them. Since their (the Jews) rejection of (Christ) meant the reconciliation of the world... nothing less than a resurrection from the dead!'* Then Paul reminds all his readers, *'God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice...'* While all may be imprisoned in their own disobedience, it is, says Paul, *'only (that God) may show mercy to all.'*

Gospel according to Matthew 15:21-28

Another social miracle this time it involves a foreigner, a woman. In the man's world of that time, the woman was very much at the margin of life, no more so as this foreign woman being a gentile, was therefore ritually unclean. *'Then out came a Canaanite woman... shouting, "Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil."* It seems that at first Jesus said nothing, so the woman must have continued with her shouting – her heartfelt appeal for help with her daughter's torment. For the disciples plead with Jesus, *'Give her what she wants because she is shouting after us.'* If beggars or groups of children asking for money have pursued you, you can imagine the scene! Jesus takes this opportunity to teach his disciples about the mercy of God. No longer to be confined to the Jewish elect, but now to be open to even the non-Jew, even to a woman. *'Woman,'* Jesus says, *'you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.'* And from that moment, Matthew tells us, *'her daughter was well again.'* God's compassion and mercy is for everyone who wants it. This is the universal call to holiness – we are all invited.

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