

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 20, 2017
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Reflection

Have you ever noticed how popular dogs have become? People like them because of their agility: they run fast, catch well, and are always up for adventure. Plus they sense what we cannot detect. The world to them is an orchestra of scents that escape us, and their ears pick up the slightest sounds. Open up a can or a slice of cheese, and your dog will show up quick, with hope and expectation. More important is the love they show us; unconditional love, no matter the failings that other people find in us. But we're not all dog-lovers. They bark, they beg, they bite; they demand attention: they're ruled by their passions.

In today's Gospel, Jesus went to Tyre and Sidon. This was the northern part of the promised land, the inheritance of Zebulun and Asher. But by then it had become a different Roman province, and was filled with Gentiles. "A Canaanite woman came out, and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all." It seems like Jesus was trying to ignore her, and she bothered his disciples. "Send her away for she keeps shouting after us." Kind of like a yappy dog. And then she began to beg. "The woman came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" Maybe this bit the conscience of the disciples. But still Jesus resisted. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Is 56:1, 6-7
Ps 67
Rom 11:13-15, 29-32
Mt 15:21-28

He had been sent to the lost sheep of Israel and wanted to focus his attention on them. It would be up to the Church planted in their midst to baptize to the ends of the earth, and then only after the end of his earthly life. So she insisted. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Jesus rewarded her persistence, boldness and faith; he healed her daughter. It was her faith that let her see what escaped the disciples. She was a child of God created in his image and likeness; loved by God who wanted to save her; reliant on God in her poverty and need. Jesus used her faith to help convert the disciples; to make them aware of the mission beyond the borders of Israel.

Everyone is called to the Kingdom. This truth eluded the people of Israel in their early history. They knew themselves to be the chosen people; descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; delivered from Egypt and led by Moses. Only after the searing humility of captivity could Isaiah hear that "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Paul would accept the psalm as a mission statement: "that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations." As the Apostle to the Gentiles, he travelled through present-day Turkey to Greece, and then on to Rome.

Preaching to the nations would bring his own people closer to God: "I glorify my ministry in order to make my own flesh and blood jealous, and thus save some of them." And we can apply that to our own lives as well.

When we bring the Gospel to others, we ourselves grow in virtue. This growth struggles with our vices, our passions, the snarling dogs within our souls. We become purified and trained, obedient to the will of the Father; able kind servants of a bold proclamation; seeing grace in suffering and joy, receiving God's love in darkness and light.