

20th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Recently, I was waiting in my car for my younger daughter to get out from work one Sunday evening at a local retailer. While I was waiting a couple a few years older than myself drove up in their expensive convertible and almost getting to the store realized it was closed. In fact it had been closed for two hours. The woman was ranting and raving about the fact this store and the home improvement store next to it, were not open late on Sundays. She was going on and on about the inconvenience and the audacity of the store managers to interfere with commerce – her words not mine! This woman had absolutely no concept of what her demand had on so many employees who had to work on that Sunday, were tired, would have loved to have enough to buy a decent car never mind the luxury kind, and maybe have a day off to enjoy and build family relationships. Not more than a week later, I was attending a ceremony for my older daughter. Her class had finished the purely academics portion of the program and was moving into the practicum year. The school had invited for their keynote speaker the director of the South Carolina Certification Board for Physician Assistants. He had spent much of his career in rural medicine in Utah and had learned many lessons in how the patient and health care provider could work together to significantly improve the community's health. I found his comments right on target for up and coming health care professionals who up until then only had book learning. When he had finished his comments, a woman my age sitting in the seats behind said out loud, "what a disappointment!" Having a child going through school obviously does not guaranty any understand of the field, but my jaw hit the floor with her comment. I don't know what she was expecting, but obviously it had nothing to do with the real world. It was so surreal listening to these two women who demonstrated that they had not grown with age and wisdom. In fact, I would characterize these inappropriate displays of selfishness as "Entitlement". I know we all have examples of this attitude and in fact it may very well be the greatest sin of the 20th and 21st century or maybe of all time. Privilege and the attitude of entitlement, somehow appeals to our human nature so easily. We want to be special, we want to be favored all because of who our ego says we are. We want things our way or they don't register in our daily lives. Anything or anyone who stands in the way is to be ignored, pushed aside or held in contempt. Well today's readings definitely hit the mark against this attitude – three times in fact.

We see it in the time of Isaiah the attitude of the Chosen People was just about them – they had their God in their temple and they could do anything they wanted. They were entitled. Isaiah almost sneaks in the idea that maybe they need to keep their end of the covenant before they can bask in God's glory. Maybe they need to get in touch with the covenant of Moses and see that it is not just a birthright to be savored, but rather required their faithfulness and living it. The Father's salvation was in fact for anyone including the foreigners that commit themselves to the will of the Father. Isaiah was placed in an impossible time with and impossible people. They had been conquered and were being dragged away from their homeland and Temple. But even here they do not get the message that salvation was something to be worked out not assumed. They did not get the message that they needed to be steadfast to living right lives without compromise. They needed to open their hearts for the Lord to dwell there in not just in the Temple of Jerusalem. They needed to realize they were being invited to teach the pagans of their wonderful God. They needed to step outside of their entitlement expectations. They needed to step outside of accepting God on their terms. Isaiah does his best with the Father's help to introduce the idea that salvation ultimately is for all peoples, for all creation and the Father was asking His Chosen People to work with Him and be His emissaries to all Creation, to deliver the message of His Glory and Mercy. These many thousands of years later we know the rest of the story – they are just like us and all of us don't always get the message.

Unlike the Chosen People we had the Father' best emissary give us the message more plainly. We have Jesus and shortly thereafter that great Saint Paul and in fact all the Apostles to spell it out for us. St Paul expands Isaiah's message even more bluntly. We are Chosen People and whether or not we want to

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believe it, we influence each other. We become Chosen People because the original Chosen People were not able to be “loving enough” examples of the Father’s love. So the Father looks elsewhere and finds and adopts Christians to be the new emissaries. In fact, as St Paul tells the Romans and us, we need to be examples to all seekers, even the Chosen People who did not get the message. With all this eloquence, it should be a whole lot plainer for us to understand our role in the world. With the words we are also given a measuring device to order and prioritize where we concentrate our time and efforts. It should be easier for us to say to ourselves - why be distracted by attitudes and activities that do not serve to glorify the Father and simultaneously not reflect the Father’s love to the pagans around us?

This theme of who is the salvation and mercy of the Father intended continues in the Gospel of Matthew we hear today. This Gospel always seemed to fly in the face of Jesus’ mission as I always thought of it. Why did he give the Canaanite woman such a hard time? Why did Jesus make such a point of the Chosen People having what appears to be preferential treatment? I dawned on me this was actually an invitation! It was an invitation to many peoples. I was an invitation to the Chosen Peoples to be faithful and be examples for all peoples and all times. They were being challenged to get back to the basics of living lives that glorified the Father and at the same time being shining examples to all those seekers that needed to be introduced to the mercy of the Father. This Gospel was also an invitation for us as Christians to be those same examples of fidelity and faithfulness to the Father. Lastly it was an invitation to the Canaanite woman to work to put her thoughts and faith into words to then become an example for all time to all people. Yes she was able to worship the Father but still stand with humility to ask for even more gifts – the healing of her daughter. The idea of humbly standing before our God and just delighting in His generosity, and wonder, and mercy is for all, but all must accept it and humbly say the Father’s will first – and then do it. When we faithfully do the will of the Father, we then live lives that will be examples to everyone around us. How we love each other even if it is at our expense. How we server each other’s needs even when it is inconvenient. How we seek each other’s wellbeing even if only by prayer, every day, is the life that guides others to its source – the Father’s love.

Yes all chosen or adopted peoples are invited to live lives that lead others to the Father and His love and salvation. That message will be needed until there are no pagans. If God had created us with no free will, then we would be just robots – God did not want that kind of relationship. Rather he wanted a relationship with those beings he called “very good”. He wanted beings who would collaborate with Him so free will could be informed and convinced in God’s holiness, love, and mercy. Not be coerced by His power and might. His creation only works to the betterment of all peoples when we do our part. This creation works when all Chosen Peoples step outside of their own self interest and entitlement attitudes and freely cooperate with the will of the Father and become examples, examples so convincing of the love and mercy of the Father that all find Him. Hence, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives.”