

Sunday 16 August 2020

Tenth Sunday After Trinity

Introduction

The Bible contains many stories of faithful women and today, in the reading from St Matthew's Gospel, we encounter the unnamed, Canaanite woman who caused Jesus to change his mind. It is at this moment that Jesus' mission moves beyond the borders of Israel to embrace the whole world. The old barriers were, in many different ways, being swept away.

First Reading: Isaiah 56.1, 6-8

The passage highlights the concern of non-Jewish people participating fully in Jewish temple worship. The implications for the 'ministry of welcome' in the Church today are clear and obvious.

Thus says the Lord:

*Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.*

*And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.
Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.*

Gospel: Matthew 15.21-28

Although she is a Gentile, the unnamed woman addresses Jesus respectfully. She is ignored by Jesus but she perseveres in faith and her daughter is healed. The story is an echo of the struggles of conscience within the Early Church.

*Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
A Canaanite woman from that region 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.
And his disciples came and urged him, saying,
'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.'
He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'
But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'*

*He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'
She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'
Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.'
And her daughter was healed instantly.*

Reflection

'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

These are disturbing words to hear on the lips of Jesus, the one we thought we knew. To her credit, the Gentile woman is not willing to accept this response so she responds: 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

In seeing the woman's faith, Jesus sees that God's children are not just to be found within his own people, but within all people; even those of different faiths or no faith, as well as a different mother-tongue, ethnicity, skin colour and culture. The point of this exchange is that at this moment the mission of Jesus moved beyond the borders of Israel to embrace the whole world. Jesus not only healed the woman's daughter but he went into the Gentile region where he continued to heal and to save.

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. The old barriers, the old taboos were, in many and different ways, being swept away. The dogs under the table were already sharing the bread of the children, and soon they would become children alongside the others.

Prayer

Lord of heaven and earth,
as Jesus taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer,
give us patience and courage never to lose hope,
but always to bring our prayers before you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table