

From The Pastor

Please give a very warm welcome this weekend to Father Richard Twohig, S.J. Father Richard is presently residing at the Columbiere Center in Clarkston where he is the Superior of the Jesuit community there. Father will share with us his experience as a missionary and make an appeal on their behalf. This is our annual missionary appeal that is coordinated through the Archdiocese. It gives us the chance to hear first hand about the missionary work of spreading the gospel, as well as sharing in that work through our offerings.

I appreciate Father Twohig coming during this weekend of my vacation. I am up north relaxing at the lake with much of my family. I will return next weekend to say the masses before I complete a second week off.

Thank you to all who have taken raffle tickets and are doing their part to make this effort successful. If everyone does what they can, I am confident we will have success. Please bring your returns to church or the office as they come in. Mark your calendars for September 7th for our Picnic.

In light of today's readings, the power of divine mercy continues to amaze and challenge us. The early faith of Israel was very exclusive. God was the God of Israel and any non-Jew was not considered to be among those favored by God. During times of exile, this exclusiveness was all the more rigid as the Israelites defended their faith in the midst of foreigners.

Today's reading from Isaiah comes after a period of exile. The people have been returned to their homeland. Every time of exile and return was a kind of conversion, a time to understand in a new way the ways of God. Trials and calamity had been endured, yet God saves. What have the people learned for their trouble? In this case, it is an amazing call for inclusive mercy to all who reverence and honor God with obedience to his commands.

God is stretching the people to a new way of knowing God as the God of all. God is not exclusive. All who seek the Lord and live with reverence and honor toward God and others, will know the favor of the Lord.

In rather symbolic language, this is the point of today's gospel. We profess Jesus as human and divine. His divine origin makes him Lord and universal Savior to all. In his human lineage, Jesus is Jewish, born in the family line of David. In today's reading, we see a very unique Jesus expressing an allegiance to his national origins rather than his universal identity and mission as divine Savior and Lord.

The woman is the axis of the whole story. There is nothing more persistent than a mother with a suffering child. She is loud, aggressive, and bold. She is also quite insightful and a sharp listener. Her first address: "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David". Though a Gentile living outside of Israel, she knows Jesus and includes his title as Lord, and Son of David. As Lord, Jesus is the one intimately connected to God, given for all people. As the Son of David, Jesus claims a particular heritage and identity of culture. The woman appeals to both natures of Jesus, human and divine.

The woman is assertive and direct for the sake of her suffering child. She needs mercy, and she knows Jesus as Lord must give it. The mission of Jesus as Lord is to mediate divine mercy through his humanity. This is our call in Christ. When we correctly align ourselves with the Spirit of God in us, we will be God's agents of mercy.

In the story, Jesus refuses to speak to a non-Jew, citing his Jewish origin. The woman is not put off. She drops the Son of Man title, and makes her plea to the Lord. Ultimately and directly saying: "Help me, Lord."

Dogs were not allowed in Jewish homes; therefore, they had to be fed outside. Gentiles allowed dogs in the family home, thus allowing them to be fed 'under the table'. This non-Jewish woman was 'outside' the house of Israel and was not privy to the food of the table. Still, she persists knowing the Messiah is the Lord of all people. Yes, Lord, she says, but even outsiders are worthy and included in the gift of divine mercy.

Jesus must relent. She has won the day. How so? Jesus obeys the will of the Father. The will of the Father is food and drink for Jesus. As gift of the Father and mediator of divine mercy, Jesus could no longer resist his mission as Lord. Perhaps having his heart stirred by the Father, Jesus affirms her 'great faith'. This great faith is not a faith in a specific church, but in the universal Lordship of God in the Messiah. For her daughter's sake she would not let go.

Neither should you or I. We are children of our Father, under the Lordship of Jesus. The divine mercy is our inheritance in Christ. But are we agents of that mercy to others? Are our lives aligned enough with Christ so as to be mercy for others? That is our call in him.

Father John Esper