

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

A reading charged with poetry. Be attentive to its rhythms, which convey a lot of its power.

profanation = prah-fuh-NAY-shuhn
Slight pause between "sabbath" and "free."

The conclusion shifts into an uplifting register.

LECTIONARY #118

READING I Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:
Observe what is **right**, **do** what is **just**;
for my **salvation** is about to **come**,
my **justice**, about to be **revealed**.

The **foreigners** who **join** themselves to the LORD,
ministering to him,
loving the **name** of the LORD,
and **becoming** his **servants**—
all who keep the **sabbath free** from **profanation**
and **hold** to my **covenant**,
them I will **bring** to my **holy mountain**
and make **joyful** in my **house** of **prayer**;
their **burnt offerings** and **sacrifices**
will be **acceptable** on my **altar**,
for my **house** shall be **called**
a **house of prayer** for all **peoples**.

READING I

Chapters 55-66 of Isaiah constitute the section known as Trito-Isaiah, a collection of prophetic material spoken to the Israelites after their return to Jerusalem following the Babylonian Exile. By the time this portion of Isaiah had been written, the Temple had been rebuilt and there needed to be a rethinking of what constituted the true nature of the religion. Sacrifice in the Temple was an established means of expressing fidelity to the covenant, but in the time that passed during the absence of the Temple, the people deepened their understanding

of what God truly looks for in choosing them as his beloved possession.

The primary theme of this passage is that the covenant is about justice, especially demonstrated in the acceptance of outsiders. The Lord's voice speaks to the people, reminding them that his justice will dawn very soon. Furthermore, the Israelites must not see themselves as having exclusive access to the fruits of God's justice. Instead, all those who love the Lord and find a way to serve him will be welcomed on God's mountain. The Lord suggests that those who have been gifted with the law

ought to teach those who do not know the law how to serve God, as well as how to keep the covenant and honor the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, those who have returned from exile rejoice in the restoration of God's house in the city of Jerusalem, but now they must extend God's household far beyond the Temple precincts. The truly acceptable sacrifice is to participate in the construction of a unity among all peoples so that God's house may become "a house of prayer for all peoples."

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

The Responsorial Psalm “has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God,” the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* says. Pray it as you prepare.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8 (4)

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us;
may he let his face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon earth;
among all nations, your salvation.

May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you!
May God bless us,
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity;
the nations on the earth you guide.

READING II Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

I am **speaking** to you **Gentiles**.

Inasmuch as I am the **apostle** to the **Gentiles**,

I glory in my **ministry** in order to make my **race jealous**
and **thus save some** of them.

For if their **rejection** is the **reconciliation** of the **world**,
what will their **acceptance** be but **life** from the **dead**?

For the **gifts** and the **call** of **God** are **irrevocable**.

Just as you once **disobeyed God**

but have now **received mercy** because of their **disobedience**,
so **they** have now **disobeyed** in order that,
by **virtue** of the **mercy** shown to you,
they too may now receive **mercy**.

For **God** delivered **all** to **disobedience**,
that he might have **mercy** upon **all**.

An uplifting message Paul addresses directly to the Gentiles.

Slight pause between “race” and “jealous.”
Slight pause between “save” and “some.”

irrevocable = ir-REV-uh-kuh-b*1

Slight pause between “mercy” and “because.”

READING II

In addressing his fellow Christians in Rome, whom he identifies as Gentiles or outsiders, Paul refers to himself as their apostle. Beginning in chapter 9, Paul begins a long exhortation regarding the privilege granted to the people of Israel as well as their responsibility to see that the law is fulfilled in Christ (Romans 10:4). It is Paul’s hope that Israel will accept the mercy of God and choose to recognize Jesus as their savior. In today’s reading we see that Paul hopes that his ministry to the Gentiles will make his own people “jealous” and lead at least some of

them (a “remnant”) to seek the way of conversion. Paul acknowledges that just as Israel’s rejection of the Christian way has led to the blossoming of the Church in foreign lands, the opportunity for them to embrace Christ will be a great sign of resurrected life in the world.

In the second half of this reading, Paul illuminates the triumphant power of God’s mercy. Both the gifts of God and his call are “irrevocable.” This is certainly true for the mercy of God. The Gentiles did not ask for mercy, but because the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul has preached God’s merciful

word to them. The “disobedience” of some has allowed others to benefit from God’s forgiveness. The bottom line is that sin and disobedience become the means by which God is able to display his very nature to the world, for he is a God that desires to “have mercy upon all.”

GOSPEL

Take note that all three readings today deal with Gentiles, or outsiders. Given the fact that Matthew is writing to a community primarily composed of Jewish Christians, it is not surprising that the tenor of this encounter

Tyre = tīr

Sidon = Sī-duhn

Even emphasis on the opening words of this reading: "At that time, Jesus withdrew . . ."

Jesus' refusal to answer the Canaanite woman, and his subsequent responses, may seem startling to us.

At last, Jesus' mood changes when he recognizes the depth of the Canaanite woman's faith.

GOSPEL Matthew 15:21–28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out,

"Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!

My daughter is tormented by a demon."

But **Jesus did not say a word in answer to her.**

Jesus' disciples came and asked him,

"Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us."

He said in reply,

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But **the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying,**

"Lord, help me."

He said in reply,

"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

She said, **"Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."**

Then Jesus said to her in reply,

"O woman, great is your faith!

Let it be done for you as you wish."

And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour.

between Jesus and the Canaanite woman seems to display exclusion. We may even wonder why Jesus would want to find seclusion in this northern region near the border of Phoenicia. He will announce that his mission is "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and yet he has placed himself squarely in foreign territory.

Nevertheless, the location has a great surprise in store for Jesus. He is able to discover an outsider to the Jewish world who has incredible faith. Three times the Canaanite woman begs Jesus to release her daughter from the torment of a demon.

After the first request, Jesus simply ignores her, while the disciples beg him to send her away. This gives Jesus the opportunity to announce the parameter of his mission as extending only for the people of Israel. In turn, the woman seems to ignore Jesus, as she performs some act of homage and states boldly, "Lord, help me." Now, Jesus replies with a rather startling comment, comparing her to a dog. Even in the face of this insult, the woman does not relent, but instead suggests that even dogs are worthy of table scraps. Her persistent pleading now causes Jesus to appreciate the depths

of her faith, and he cures the daughter from a distance at that very moment. Matthew uses the story to demonstrate an expansion of the mission in the vision of Jesus himself. S.W.