



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



20th Sunday in Ordinary Time August 17, 2014

For the last several Sundays we have been witnessing our Lord tell great parables, work great wonders, and feed the multitudes. We have been enjoying our Lord in his majesty and rejoicing in how much he loves us. He indeed works another miracle in the passage from Matthew's Gospel today, but not before calling us Gentiles a bunch of dogs! Wow, that is not something we would expect from the God who loves us. What does it mean?

The woman in the Gospel passage was a Gentile, a Canaanite from the region of Tyre and Sidon – in modern day Lebanon. These cities were centers of pagan worship, and were not places included in the Covenant with God's people. This is why the apostles rebuked the woman, and why Jesus himself made a distinction between the children – meaning the children of the Covenant or the children of Israel – and the Gentiles – basically the rest of us. I say "us" because, while there may be some here who are descendants of Israel, most of us fall into the other camp. We are the dogs, begging for scraps, like the Canaanite woman said. But look at how Jesus reacts to her words. He sees that she understands the truth. She knows what she is asking; she is asking for divine assistance from the table of the Lord, not just some important person, but from the Lord God himself. This is why Jesus exclaims to her, this outsider, pagan, Gentile: "O woman, great is your faith!" He sees the light of the Gospel in her heart, and shares fully of his grace with her.

This is truly the story of all of us. We do not belong to the original Covenant, we are not the chosen people of old. We are the outsiders, begging at the table for scraps. But our Lord sees us and is moved by his love for us. In his love, we are not given mere scraps, but rather the full share of his table: his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – a share in his very life. What a great gift for us who deserve so little. Not only have we been given these gifts, but as St. Paul states of us Gentiles who have received salvation: “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.” We will never be separated from the love of God. How amazing! How beautiful! We are the ones, of whom Isaiah writes: “The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants.” Thanks be to God who has called us to his service, who has healed us of our wounds, and has called us to his table as his family.

But it is not enough to simply give thanks with our words to God for including us outsiders and foreigners in his Kingdom, we must also follow the Lord in his ways. The Lord’s way of loving is the way we must live and love. There is no other way to live in the Kingdom. So, what does this mean for us? It means that we too must do as Jesus did, and open our hearts to the outsider, the foreigner, the one who is not “one of us,” so that all nations may praise the Lord. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has called us to remember this call of the Lord. He has challenged us to go “to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.”

There are some obvious examples from the world of today. We have been greatly concerned lately for the well-being of the unaccompanied minors from Latin America and indeed the situation of immigrants here in the United States in general. The Church has been calling us all to open our hearts to a new way of thinking that both honors the right of the State to have secure and regulated borders, but also allows us to see these people who are displaced from their homes, or have to leave to find work, as our brothers and sisters, as fellow human beings, and not a some “problem” or “threat.”

Today we have been asked by the Holy Father to pray in a special way for the people of Iraq, the Christians and other religious minorities being persecuted there, and indeed for all in the Middle East. These people are also our brothers and sisters.

But there are many others right here who are “outsiders” in our midst. To them to we must extend our love, our fellowship, and our good will. There are no barriers or divisions to the love of God. All people are called to experience the freedom of the Gospel, and therefore we have no authority to deny it to anyone. We have been called out of darkness and error in to the light of God’s Kingdom, and we were not of the Covenant. God shared his grace freely with us, so who are we to deny it to anyone we may meet?

The Lord has given us a share of his great gifts. May he give us the grace to open our hearts to all he has placed in our path. Think of the ones you are rejecting as outsiders and foreigners in your own lives. Then remember just how unworthy you were to receive God’s love. Let the overwhelming generosity of our Lord be your guide. Open your heart, your mind, your soul to the limitless love of our God, and be converted. Be a true member of the family of God and remove the barriers that keep you from loving as you should. Then, come to the table of the Lord, having been healed from this hour onward. Sit at his table and receive his grace in its fullness so that you may share it with all you meet.

May our Lady, who knew rejection and isolation, help you to open your heart to the Love of her Son. Through her intercession in your life, may you be always open to the saving and transforming love of God.

“O God, let all the nations praise you!”