

Major Superiors of Men

August 7, 2019

In the first reading the people of God are at a frontier, just outside the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Journeys, migrations, and exploring new frontiers are integral to salvation history and the Christian life. They involve both promises and risks. Neither should be minimized or disregarded.

In 1691, a small group of Spanish explorers made camp near here. Because it was the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, the chaplain, Father Damien Massanet, named the river San Antonio and celebrated the first Mass. In 1718, Franciscans accompanied a small Spanish military expedition that was sent here and built this San José and San Miguel Mission. Although the friars' outreach to the indigenous population was ultimately unsuccessful, a vibrant Catholic community still worships here today. Risks and promise.

Any major religious superior – and every bishop and archbishop! – can identify with Moses' irritation in today's first reading – as well as God's own frustration with the people! They are on the frontier of entering the Promised Land, a land full of milk and honey, but the community is divided about whether or not it is

possible or feasible! (The difference between you and me, my brothers, is that your terms of office are probably limited, while mine keeps on until old age and retirement.) But God is our focus today! God has made the promise! God will fulfill the promise! Trust God! Even when the wait for fulfillment seems long delayed. The kingdom of God is already among us even though there are very obvious signs that it is not yet fully established. We are people of hope!

In today's gospel, Jesus has crossed the frontier into Gentile territory. While he is at dinner with his disciples, a woman approaches him. She is marginalized in at least two ways: she is a woman in a man's world, and she is not only a foreigner but also a despised "Canaanite" – conjuring up memories of hundreds of years of struggle between ancient Israel and its pagan neighbors!

Jesus at first ignores her and her request that he release her daughter from a demon. Then he reminds his disciples that his mission up to this point has been only to the House of Israel. The woman is persistent, even when Jesus responds to her with a nasty parable! Her answer reflects her humility, persistence, and faith – in him as Lord and Son of David. Jesus finally embraces her and her daughter in his healing ministry. What a powerful lesson for those

who would divide us into ever more polarized camps – insiders and outsiders, traditionalists and liberals, Democrats and Republicans, diocesan and religious, priests and laity, readers of *Catholic News Register* and *Catholic News Reporter*! We are called to unity, and God can enable us to come together to give persistent, common witness to the gospel!

Pope Francis has consistently laid out for us the route we are to travel on our pilgrimage of faith: encounter, dialogue, inclusion. As missionary disciples we are called and sent to proclaim the risen Lord and his gospel. We are to build bridges, not fences. We are to build up the kingdom of justice and peace, mercy and compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation, and unconditional, enduring love.

Our Lady of Guadalupe embraces each of us with her maternal love and inspires us to bring forth the word of God into our world, as she did. The Holy Spirit is our guide. *Ven, Holy Spirit, Ven!*