

HOMILY for 20th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us how Jesus was able to reach out to help a Canaanite woman despite the hurdles of His Jewish culture & tradition. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this new cute story that I'd like to share with you.

God offered His tablets of Commandments to the world. God first approached the Italians. "What Commandments do you offer?" they asked.

"Thou shall not murder," God replied.

"Sorry, we are not interested," said the Italians.

Next, God offered the tablets to the Romanians. "What Commandments do you offer?" They asked.

They answered, "Sorry, we are not interested."

Next, God offered them to the French. "What Commandments do you offer?" they asked.

"Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife?" God replied.

"Sorry, we are not interested," they answered.

Finally, God approached the Jews. "How much?" they asked.

"They are free," God replied.

"We'll take all ten of them," they responded.

Anyway, we've learned how Jesus did a lot of pastoral work & miracles for the Jewish Community in the Gospel. But, this Sunday's Gospel is one of the few times that we have been told that He allowed people of other cultures & traditions come to Him for help. This time it was a Canaanite woman, who reminds us about a similar encounter that Jesus had at the well. But, each time we could see how His Jewish tradition held Him back & kept Him away from associating with other cultures & traditions. Here is how this Sunday's Gospel tells us about Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman, "...A Canaanite woman living in that locality presented herself & cried out to Him [Jesus], 'Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is terribly troubled by a demon.' But, Jesus gave her no word of response. His disciples came up & began to entreat Him, 'Get rid of her. For she keeps shouting after us.' 'My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' Jesus replied." In fact, Jesus finally confessed how Judaism & Jewish culture viewed the Canaanite woman & other religious traditions & foreign cultures around them as He said, "It is not right to take the food of sons & daughters & throw it to the dogs."

If one of us had said something like that in our day & age, we would never hear the end of it as the public would call us all sorts of names & phrases. Unfortunately, that was the type of world & ugly reality that Jesus was born into & lived in during His time on earth. The Jews did not want to associate with other cultures & consider non-Jewish people their neighbors. Likewise, all the foreign cultures & other religious traditions viewed Judaism & treated the Jews the same way. That separation & hostile feeling has certainly been on display in the last two thousand years as one group has kept fighting with another group in the Middle East. Jesus has always wanted to put an end to those fights & re-define neighbor as He taught the public about the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable, we learn that a Samaritan was able to overcome the social separation & offer his compassionate care & financial assistance to a Jewish victim of a horrible robbery while other Jews simply ignored that terrible scene & walked on the other side of the road. Jesus was able to use the Parable of the Good Samaritan to help re-define the meaning of neighbor & bring all religions and cultures closer to one another. A neighbor is not someone who shares the same bloodline & culture like Jewish society might have told the public. A true neighbor is someone who shows love & compassion to people around him/her in spite of different cultures & religious

traditions. If every human being would take up that new teaching of neighbor from Jesus & live it out, our world would definitely be full of peace & love instead of fights & hate as we see right now. For our current world usually considers someone to be a neighbor if the person shares the same skin color, race, religion, social status, interests, & so on.

However, peace & love are not the only blessing that we find under the new definition of neighbor & in the new world. Here is another blessing that will fill up our world as the Canaanite woman responded, "Please Lord, even the dogs eat the leavings that fall from their masters' tables." In other words, the Lord will bless it abundantly & let everyone have their fill regardless of skin color, race, religion, social status, or interests. For the Lord is kind & generous to every human being. That is why Vatican II used the term "Anonymous Christian" to keep Jesus' new definition of neighbor alive & include every one of other religions & traditions in God's mysterious plan of salvation. A person might be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Jewish. But, the term "Anonymous Christian" would include them all & allow Jesus to save them & give them a chance to enter Heaven after He grants that privilege to all Christians first. Indeed, today's First Reading confirms God's mysterious plan of salvation as following, "...The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, minister to Him, love the name of the Lord, & become His servants... Then I will bring to my holy mountain & make joyful in my house of prayer... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." So, prophet Isaiah wants to remind us & confirm with us that the Lord always desires to unite all peoples of various religions & traditions & build up a peaceful & loving world. We got to cooperate with the Lord & make that divine will come true.

Another important spiritual lesson that today's Gospel wants to teach us is to intercede for others & their needs. That is how we could fight & defeat selfishness & greed in our world. The Canaanite woman did not come to Jesus & pray for her own needs. Instead, she asked Jesus to help her daughter who was terribly troubled by a demon. Perhaps that is why we Catholics have come to Mary & the saints & ask them to intercede for our needs. For we believe that they will act like the Canaanite mother & ask Jesus to grant us our needs. Besides, we are all sinners; & we need holy people like them to come close to Jesus & present prayer requests on our behalf. That way our prayers will have a better chance to be granted. Ironically, most Protestants claim that they are better than Catholics at reading the Bible, but somehow they have missed this important lesson in today's Gospel. So, keep coming to Mary & the saints to ask them to intercede for our prayers. But, more importantly, let's try to ask the Lord to help out people in need around us like the Canaanite mother did for her afflicted daughter. That is how we could get rid of our current selfish & greedy world & build up a new peaceful & loving one like the Lord has desired.

My dear brothers & sisters, a Canaanite mother came to Jesus whose culture & tradition were different from hers. But, she believed that His God would help her & heal her daughter. That is exactly what happened as her daughter was freed from being possessed by a demon. Her faith in Jesus & her courage to come to Him brought about that miracle as well as broke down the social barrier between the Jews & her people the Canaanites. Hopefully we would imitate her & try to intercede for people in need & help break down all the social barriers & biases in our world.