

Homily
20th Sunday OT – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 26-27, 2023

Is 56: 1, 6-7
Ps 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8
Rm 11: 13-15, 29-32
Mt 15: 21-28

A little bit of biblical catechesis before we start this homily. So essentially, the Church's Liturgical Year for Sundays is divided into three different cycles: Cycle A, Cycle B and Cycle C. Cycle A primarily focuses on the gospel of Matthew, the one on which we focus this year. Cycle B focuses on the gospel of Mark and the theme of "The Messianic Secret." Cycle C focuses on the gospel of Luke and the theme of "radical discipleship." (The gospel of John is interspersed within all three liturgical years and primarily is used during the season of Easter.)

Each gospel has a different theme; I teach my university students that if we used the analogy of watching a football or baseball game, you would have the action broadcast by the play-by-play announcer and your color commentator, who explains the significance of each play of the game. Using this analogy, I state that the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke focus on the "play by play" announcer, who pretty much

takes over the story. In contradistinction, the gospel of John focuses more on the color commentator, who tells us not necessarily all that Jesus does, but more importantly *who Jesus is* and why he does what he does (Church scholars call this a type of “Christology,” concerning who Jesus is rather than what Jesus does).

In the gospel of Mark, I focus on the theme on the image that the outsiders are looking in (namely the reader) having more knowledge about Jesus than do the insiders who are looking out (namely the apostles). In Mark’s gospel, those who are closest to Jesus do not have a clue on who Jesus is, but the outsiders do, whether it is those possessed by demons, those who are Gentiles, those who are Samaritans, they have a very clear understanding of who God is. In the Gospel of Luke, the focus is on the Holy Spirit, the gospel of Matthew. This year’s texts focus on what I call a textbook of faith. Pretty much Jesus establishing the way we need to live. If we believe in God in these particular readings today, in the 20th Sunday of the year, these readings give me very much a vibe as if we were back in the gospel of Mark all three readings, whether it be the outsiders, the foreigners in our first reading,

whether it be the Gentiles of our second reading, whether it be the Canaanite woman that Matthew describes today, the foreigners who are not part of the “inner circle” of faith, and supposedly us who know the end of the story and should know what we need to do in order to get to heaven.

Like those who might profess to live as a Hindu, Buddhist, Jew or Muslim, many individuals might say the he or her is Catholic or Christian, but in reality are only so by name and not by faith. As we learn in today’s gospel, often the foreigners or the outsiders display more of a grasp in the faith than those of us who claim to be insiders who say that we understand God but do not live the life as well as the outsiders.

In our first reading today, the foreigners displayed a greater sense of the faith than the Chosen People do! In our second reading, St. Paul in talks about how the outsiders, the Gentiles, those who are not circumcised, those who are not associated with Christianity, have such a great faith as well. St. Paul explains that he, too, is seen as an outsider – prior to his conversion, Paul was a Pharisee who enabled others to kill

Christians; only after his conversion did the Pharisee change his ways. We learn that as an outsider, he was considered a traitor by Jews of his time and not trusted by Christians who knew his murderous ways before his conversion. As an outsider ministering to outsider, Paul was not trusted by many of the Gentiles as well – they often beat him, stoned him, kicked him out of many towns and ultimately beheaded him because of his adherence to Christianity and Christ crucified.

In our gospel reading today, the Canaanite woman who represented yet another outsider exhibited such a great faith, more than many within the faith had offered. Not even the apostles who claimed to be insiders would show that kind of faith that the Canaanite woman did - how many of those apostles stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus died? In the Synoptic gospels from Matthew, Mark and Luke, none of them expressed that faith (and only one of the apostles did in the gospel of John). If we have that same mentality as the outsiders did in our scriptures today, imagine how much our faith would grow if we actually exhibited the faith that outsiders to in the world!

This focus on the “outsider” has been evident in every single age,

including the present one. Prior to 1960, many of our Churches in the United States comprised of “outsiders,” so to speak, those from foreign countries who entered the United States to establish a new start for their families. When the Diocese of Joliet was established in 1949, this country encountered outsiders who chose to enter this “New World” and, as a result, “national Churches” were established to focus on cultural identities that entered the US. In the city of Joliet alone were Churches established by all kinds of different ethnic groups with different cultural traditions. In Joliet, we saw the birth of Croatian parishes and German parishes. We saw churches established by immigrants from Slovenian, Ireland and Italy among other European groups.

After the 1960s, the great majority of the immigrants in this country came from what the US bunched together as Hispanics from countries south of the US Border that were very distinct from each other yet classified as if they were one in the same. To tell a person from Mexico that they were the same as a Columbian, Puerto Rican or Brazilian was to have an inadequate understanding of the cultural diversity of this part of the world (even within countries exist sub-cultures reflected

within the different states of each geographical region!). Because of this growth, the Catholic focus in the US has adjusted as well to a different type of so-called foreigner that has taught us so much about the ways of faith!

The theme to our readings and to our faith lives is very evident this weekend – if we accept what some consider foreigners, if those on the so-called inside understand that many from the so-called outside have a great faith from which we can learn and if we learn from each other, no matter who the person is, we may not agree with people, we may not understand people, but if we learn from people, great things can happen.

In my first year at the seminary, we were required to go to all kinds of communities that were foreign to us seminarians, to cultures distinct from the ones in which we were raised. In my particular case, I was sent to a Vietnamese community, a black community and a Hispanic community to learn about the faith lives of others. In the process, I got to learn all kinds of wonderful things from wonderful people that were different from me yet embraced the same Holy Spirit that was sealed

inside of me as well. When I go on my pilgrimages with faithful parishioners from the area, we were able to learn the customs of three distinct cultural groups from Bosnia, Portugal and France. A local priest once taught me that if I wanted to grow as a priest, then I should travel to other places to see how other people pray, to learn how the so-called outsiders could teach a so-called insider like me about my own faith life.

A few months back, a priest from the Peoria Diocese named Fr. John Horton wanted to visit St. Anne's Church. Fr. Horton celebrated Mass with the faithful from the parish. Fr. John told me that, in the senior years of his life, he wanted to visit those parishes that his mentor served. In this particular case, the mentor was named Fr. Joseph Dionne, who served as pastor at St. Anne's from 1937-1940. As an outsider coming to Chicago, Fr. Dionne influenced Fr. Horton in such a way that Fr. Horton wished to follow Fr. Dionne's path as a Catholic priest.

To encounter first-hand how outsiders positively other people in the world of faith opens my eyes as to how outsiders so much can make a difference in my life so that, hopefully, I can become a better priest in the way I live my life. For this way, each of you can teach me about the

way of faith and I, an outsider to the Border Town area, can allow God to work through me to teach all of you. When we open our hearts to the outsiders who come in so that we can tell them that we love them and that they are welcome, we learn that message from the three readings today, and hopefully that allows our hearts to be a little bit more forgiving, a little bit more open, a little bit more tolerant, and very much accepting of those who are coming in from the outside. That is what our scripture readings are teaching us today.

Do we wish to learn from the so-called outsiders? Do we wish to negate them? That is completely up to us, but let us just make sure we do what is right by God. Let us do right for those from the outside coming in. If they show us great faith, we should be accepting them and learning from them, which people who are entrenched in living a certain way find very difficult to change. Every person is unique and can teach us something; it really just matters where our heart is in this journey of faith and where we are willing to accept people and receive people's gifts or whether we wish to shut them out, as was the case so many times in our scriptures and in today's age.

Thank you very much for teaching me. May I hopefully be able to teach you, allowing God to work through me to share with you so we can build these kingdoms together and share these kingdoms with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.