

Read

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Psalms 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time August 20, 2023



REFLECTION

Jesus' actions at the beginning of today's Gospel reading might seem strange to us. Why is he ignoring this woman who clearly wants and needs his help? Yet as we read on, we see an important point being made. We see the disciples' reaction to the woman, wondering if they should serve a Canaanite woman. Her ethnicity and her gender make her someone that many in Jesus' society would have no interest in spending time with, much less healing her daughter. But in the end, Jesus' actions reveal what is most important to him: faith. Even though Jesus was the messiah who the people of Israel had been waiting for, this encounter shows that anyone can respond to God with faith. Jesus' praise of the Canaanite woman's strong faith must have been surprising to the disciples. The point that we should take away from today's readings is that all people, no matter how different they seem to us, are worthy of God's love.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Who is part of your community? How can you be more welcoming of others?
- ❖ How can you use your faith to help others see the value of those who are different from them?



ACTION

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Dr. King knew the importance of showing compassion and mercy to everyone, even to those who are different than ourselves. Dr. King worked tirelessly to create a world where Jesus' message of inclusion came alive. This week look for someone in your life who is considered an outsider. Reach out to that person with a smile, a kind word or even an invitation to hang out.



Learn about the ongoing work of the King Center
<https://thekingcenter.org/>



August 20, 2023

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #118A

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel, we find Jesus and his disciples being pursued by a woman who needs healing for her daughter. Even as Jesus seems to be turning her away, he creates an opportunity for her deep faith to be shown and for his mercy to be given. The woman's witness of persistence encourages us to be persistent in our own prayer and cry for mercy. When we face hopeless situations, we must turn to God rather than to despair.

Q FOCUS: *In our greatest need, God will answer us when we call out to him.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

St. Bernard's feast day is August 20. He was born in France in 1090 and later became an abbot (leader of a monastery) in the Cistercian order. During his life he helped to found new monasteries throughout Europe. He also wrote many important theological works that helped the Church grow. His theological and spiritual insights led him to work for unity within the Church when it was in danger of being broken apart by schism. Because of all of his great works and contributions, he is known as a Doctor of the Church. This is a title given to some saints who, through their writings and actions, greatly contributed to the life of the Church.

Church Teaching Connection

"There are two things that cannot be separated: forgiveness granted and forgiveness received. However, many people struggle; they cannot forgive. . . . We are all debtors. All of us. To God who is so generous and to our brothers and sisters. Everyone knows that he/she is not the father or mother that he or she should be . . . [or] the brother or sister. We are all 'in deficit' in life. And we need mercy" (Pope Francis, General Audience, March 18, 2020).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 15:21-28

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

For you to feel what mercy feels like, what do you have to experience first? Some people say that unless you know true hate, you will not know true love. Or, unless you experience the highest point of the mountain, you won't know the lowest point of the valley. Unless you have lost the dearest blessing to you, you will not be able to treasure those people or things that mean the most to you. Being able to experience these extremes is itself a gift from God.

► **What are some of the extreme emotions or situations that young people your age might face?**

Have you felt any of these extreme emotions before? Take for example a teenager who has seen their parents go through marital challenges, maybe even experience a divorce. The tragic part of that moment is the extreme feeling of loss: loss of family, loss of peace and security, loss of two present parents. But God can use that moment to prepare the teenager for his or her life later on as he or she experiences the high joy of his or her vocation, either as a single person, to the religious life or ordination, or to marriage.

We know that God's mercy is always offered, even if the situation might seem insignificant to others. When we experience cruelty and hatred or when

we know the depths of sin, then we can see more clearly the overwhelming fullness of God's mercy and love.

The woman in the Gospel today had surely experienced pain in her past and had been the object of scorn for others. Even in this Gospel story, we see her plea for help being ignored. In spite of that, she is seeking the mercy and love of God for the healing of her daughter. She is doing all she can to help her daughter be free from the demons that possess her. In the face of rejection, she has great faith that the peace and love of God can heal her child and that Jesus is the only one who can offer that. Her great love for her daughter inspires her to seek that mercy that God offers. In the end, Jesus does heal her daughter and praises the woman for her faith.

The Gospel passage we hear today leaves us waiting until the end to experience a resolution to the extreme concern and frustration the woman felt. Leading up to it, we see a model of persistent petition that we can use in our prayer life. The woman is relentless when it comes to asking for help. She will not stop at the resistance she experiences. She does not stop even though she is not who Jesus says he came to save. She does not stop when their conversation is met with arguments. She knows, despite everything, she needs help and she needs specific help from Jesus.

► **Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you needed Jesus' help? A situation where only by the grace of God would a solution be possible? What did you do?**

The woman in today's Gospel has the courage to pursue Jesus. As we continue our journey of faith, we need to remember to have the courage of this woman to ask for help and to advocate for those who need peace, joy, and love in their lives. Jesus is merciful. It is who he is. We can always run to him; we just need to have courage.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 14.

God's love and mercy can overcome any moment of pain and suffering, no matter how big or how small.

When we are met with hardships, we need to remember that we are children of God.

To have true faith means that we must have hearts full of courage.

Act on the Word

Beauty from Ashes

For this activity, you will need to have a list of several bad situations or events prepared ahead of time (see below for examples).

Divide the teens into small groups of about three to four people. Share with them that they will be spending the next several minutes exploring the ways the beauty of God's mercy can shine through in desperate situations.

Assign each group one of the bad situations or devastating moments from your list. Situations could include things like the death of a loved one, an accident that paralyzes someone, an injury that ends a sports season or ends the whole sports career, experiencing the divorce of someone's parents, being a witness to someone who has an addiction, having to move to another town due to a parent's job change, or receiving a diagnosis of a terminal illness.

Invite the teens to spend the next few minutes brainstorming ways that God's love and mercy can enter into this situation and create peace and joy for

those involved in it. After the groups have finished their discussions, invite the teens to share what they discussed with the larger group. If anyone (teens or leaders) has a personal experience with any of these situations and they are comfortable sharing, they can share how God's mercy was at work in their experience with the group.

As this time together ends, remind the youth that Jesus is merciful and we have to have courage to invite him into our lives, especially when our lives are difficult and it might be hard to trust him or remember who he is. We often blame Jesus for our circumstances instead of running to him for mercy, compassion, and understanding. When we remember who Jesus is, our faith in him grows stronger.

Closing Prayer

Your mercy, O God,
never fails to raise us up
and to heal our brokenness.

Grant to us the faith of the Canaanite woman
that we might turn to you in our need
and never forget the compassion of your Son,

Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.itp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.