



16th Sunday after Pentecost

September 9th, 2018

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23;

Psalms 125;

James 2:1-10, 14-17;

Mark 7:24-26a, 26b-28, 29-30

1ST READING

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favour is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.

2ND READING

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

PSALM 125

p. 884

- 1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, * which cannot be moved, but stands fast for ever.
- 2 The hills stand about Jerusalem; * so does the Lord stand round about his people, from this time forth for evermore.
- 3 The sceptre of the wicked shall not hold sway over the land allotted to the just, * so that the just shall not put their hands to evil.
- 4 Show your goodness, O Lord, to those who are good * and to those who are true of heart.
- 5 As for those who turn aside to crooked ways, the Lord will lead them away with the evildoers; * but peace be upon Israel.

Lord, surround your people with your presence. Do not let us stretch out our hands to evil deeds, or be destroyed by the snares of the enemy, but bring us to share the land prepared for the saints in light, where you live and reign, God, now and forever.

3RD READING

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin.

4TH READING

She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

5TH READING

Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go — the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

What would you do? What indeed, would any one of us do? Picture yourself as the mother of a little daughter who was a real problem child. She was not a problem because she wanted to be. She was a problem because it appeared that she was possessed by a demon.

Where does one turn in a situation like that? "To Jesus", we might say. He had a reputation for healing and casting out demons. After all, he was conveniently in town that day. Perhaps he could help — if only he would.

But there were complications. It was said that Jesus' ministry seemed to be more concerned with the Jews — rather than Gentiles. Gentiles were not warmly received by the Jews; nor the Jews warmly by the Gentiles.

Yet, many believed that Jesus was the Son of God — in effect, that he was God. Wouldn't, shouldn't God be the one who could help? Wouldn't God be the best one to call upon for help? So it would seem. So why not go for it? Still in the air for Gentiles, there was that overriding problem of God in the form of Jesus being a Jew.

As a Gentile, do you walk away? Or alternatively, as one who has heard the stories about the miracles of Jesus, do you put your pride aside, and risk actually approaching Jesus? And if you have to beg or kneel — are you ready to do just that? What would you do?

I suppose there would be a third option of analyzing your options so thoroughly that by the time you finished coming to a conclusion, Jesus would have left town. Your decision would have been thereby made for you by default — no Jesus — no healing — no casting out of demons. And of course whatever the decision — it would impact your life, and that of your daughter for the rest of your lives. Right or wrong — you would have to live with it — your daughter would have to live with it!

Well, we have just heard what this Syrian woman did. She seized the moment and went directly up to Jesus. She then swallowed her pride and bowed before him and begged for her daughter's release from the demon. But really, what other choice would have any potential for success?

And the response? Off to a bad start, or so it seemed. Jesus in effect, said that he was putting his priorities on Jewish folk, including children.

How did this woman react? Would she cower and back away? Would she just give up on God? — giving God one chance at validation? Would she fall in a heap on the floor sobbing her heart out? Would she strike out at Jesus in anger? None of the above!

What then, did this loving mother do? She stood up for her full humanity and that of her daughter! Jesus using the metaphor of dogs to represent Gentile foreigners, had implied unkindly, that this woman and her child were of lesser value. Using Jesus' reference to dogs, this mother pointed out that the leftovers of some people are often eaten by others who cannot be sustained in any other way. Surely, that would have ended the discussion and the Gentile woman would have been sent back home empty-handed.

But we read that that is not the case, here. Christ is so impressed by this woman's love and determination as a full human being, that he grants her request and the demon was cast out of the little girl.

Some believe that Jesus' use of the term 'dogs' was purposely implemented to bring the good qualities and strengths of this woman to the surface. In reading the Gospels, we find Jesus frequently recognizing and embracing the value of people of all backgrounds and religious beliefs (e.g., woman at the well; the good Samaritan come to mind). God as Creator, embraces all humanity. In Genesis, God created people and is quoted as seeing them as being 'good'. That would include all the varieties of human beings that enrich the earth.

People have done and continue to do all too much, to divide God's people. The time is long overdue for all peoples to move forward to love and respect those who are not clones of ourselves. If one looks carefully with an open mind, one cannot but help to see the humanity created in each one of us. In our Baptism service, we talk about seeing Christ in all people. That means all people. All folk are our neighbour — as we are all someone else's neighbour. Jesus saw the Syrian woman as his neighbour. In his love of her and her daughter, Christ broke the old traditions and responded to her cry for help to have her daughter freed from the demon.

Jesus didn't just sympathize. He acted! We are not only to believe in faith, we are to act! As the Epistle of James clearly puts it:

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Thanks be to our God of unlimited love.