**20TH SUND. ORD. (A)**

**MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE**

Is the Catholic Church the one mentioned here? The word “Catholic” means what, or stands for what? It means or stands for “universal,” that is, open to all people.

In the first reading, the Lord made it clear to the Israelites that He is a God who is Father of all. The Israelites, returning from exile, would have had to adjust to foreigners living there as well. Some of these aliens were God-fearing and God-seeking people. They were eager to obey God’s commandments and draw near to Him. !

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God was ready to accept foreigners who were ready to minister to Him and love His name; their burnt offerings and sacrifices would be accepted on His altar. They would also experience His salvation and deliverance.

His house would be a house of prayer for all people.

In the gospel a Gentile woman asked Jesus for help for her daughter. She acknowledged the status of Jesus by the way she addressed Him: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, the Son of David”. Her faith was tested by Jesus and she passed the test. She received what she needed, the healing of her daughter.

St. Paul is considered an apostle to the Gentiles. He told the Romans that God’s desire is that all may be saved, Jews and Gentiles alike. He told the Galatians also that everyone that has been baptized in Christ is a child of God. “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can neither be slave nor free man, there can neither be male nor female - for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” (Gal. 3:26-28).

Who qualifies to be a “Catholic,” and who qualifies to be in God’s presence? What is the qualification to be in the house of God? Is it nationality, status in life, gender, age, colour, creed, size? In fact, all of these and none of these. It is the one who has faith in God and loves Him and does His will. The Psalmist asks a question, “Yahweh, who can find a home in your tent, who can dwell on your holy mountain?” And the answer he found is, “Whoever lives blamelessly, who acts uprightly, who speaks the truth from the heart, who keeps the tongue under control, who does not wrong a comrade, who casts no discredit on a neighbour, who looks with scorn on a vile, but honours those who fear Yahweh,” (Ps. 15:1-4). So no matter who you are and your place of origin if you go by God’s commandments and do what pleases Him, you will be saved.

Are we ‘Catholic’ the way the word means? Yes; gathered here it may seem so, but is it true by the way we relate to one another, and the way we accept one another as he or she is? Do we not behave like the Israelites before exile thinking that no foreigner deserved to be saved? Are we not acting like the apostles telling Jesus to drive the woman away?

My house shall be a house of prayer for all people. So I am welcome and you are welcome. But are we offering a sacrifice pleasing to Him? Do we come with clean hands and pure hearts embracing each other as God embraces everyone?

St. Paul advises the Ephesians thus, “Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of that peace that binds you together. There is one body and one spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all,” (Eph. 4:3-6). “Let us be thankful, then, because we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us be grateful and worship God in a way that will please Him, with reverence and awe,” (Heb. 12:28).