

20th Ordinary Sunday
August 16, 2020
“Conditioning and Choices”

Is 56:1-7

Rom 11:13...32

Mt 15:21-28

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

It’s always sad and disheartening when we see someone we love make a bad decision. What we clearly see that they should do for the best outcome, they, unfortunately, do not see at all. Of course, we don’t walk in their shoes. We can’t possibly know all that goes into their decision-making. But when the outcome is what we predicted, it becomes obvious that they did not make the best choice.

The same is true for ourselves. We make bad choices, even when others can see that we are headed for trouble and misfortune.

Part of our problem is that we know only the past and the present moment. We cannot see into the future. Moreover, our past usually influences what we will do in the present moment – as well as the choices we make.

One of the things that influences us in the present is our conditioning. We all have opinions, biases, and prejudices. These are often based upon what has been handed down from our parents and ancestors over successive generations. And it is very difficult to make the best choice if our hearts and minds have been conditioned against it.

The Chosen People had been especially favored by God. They knew that there was only one true God. But they also had enemies who sought to destroy them. Moreover, they were often unfaithful to God and disregarded God’s precepts and commandments. They were also conditioned to believe that God did not care about other nations or races.

Consequently, through Isaiah, God reveals a brand new teaching. The Lord, their God, is the God of everyone – of every land, race, and nation. God calls all people to Himself. And anyone of any land, race, or nation who serves and worships the Lord God – will be blessed by God’s presence and love! Therefore, the Chosen People had to make room in their hearts and lives for even those who, before, they had disdained and rejected.

St. Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus, although both human and divine, was himself influenced by what he had been taught and culturally prepared to accept. The human nature of Jesus had to struggle to learn and understand God's plan just as we do. Although Jesus always made the right choices and did God's will, he could not see into the future – unless God revealed it to him. Hence, his resistance toward the Canaanite woman in today's scripture passage.

The Canaanite woman was a pagan. She did not seem to know her place in Jewish society. Thus, she refused to be dismissed by the menfolk who accompanied Jesus. However, she was both bold and humble before Jesus. She politely persisted and engaged Jesus in a debate which she actually won! Jesus realized her faith and blessed her by healing her daughter. Jesus responded to the Holy Spirit – and to the Father who had sent the woman. And – even if Jesus did see everything clearly beforehand – his disciples could not. Thus, Jesus revealed to them that they could harbor no discrimination toward anyone regarding gender, religion, or ethnic background!

Today, St. Paul tells the Romans and us that Jesus brought salvation to everyone. Paul reached out to the Gentile pagans because the Jews had rejected who Jesus was and what he came to do. The Gentiles were blessed because the Jews had made the wrong choices.

Nevertheless, Paul believed that the Jews could, ultimately, attain salvation – Because in God's infinite plan, they would be given another chance. After all, they were chosen to bring the Messiah into the world. Consequently, there had to be some plan for their eventual reconciliation!

Brothers and Sisters, we have been given so much. We have been blessed with 2000 years of Christianity. Yet, we continue to fail as individuals, as nations, and even as a Church – because of our conditioning, our biases, and our prejudices.

So, let us pray, today, to be able to rise above these things. May we learn to see as God wants us to see. And may we open our minds and hearts to all the new possibilities that will be revealed to us!

Amen.

August 16, 2020

Msgr. Russell G. Terra

