

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle A) Homily

St. William, Champion | August 16, 2020

Is 56:1, 6-7 | Rom 11:13-15, 29-32 | Mt 15:21-28

Back when I was in my early adulthood, I remember watching the show Cheers when it was part of NBC's Must See TV. For all the shows I watched, I can't remember many of the plots of the episodes, but I do remember the refrain to the theme song...

Where everybody knows your name
And they're always glad you came
You want to be where you can see
Troubles are all the same
You want to be where everybody knows your name

But I think that isn't always the case. Sometimes just the opposite is true. We really want to go where **nobody** knows our name, somewhere we can fly under the radar, somewhere we don't have everybody counting on us for everything – somewhere we can take a break, some time to recharge.

I think that was the setting for today's Gospel. Jesus had left Galilee and gone off to Tyre and Sidon – to a place away from His followers where He was not well-known. Remember that it was only a couple of weeks ago that he went off alone and the crowd figured out

where He was going, and He spent the day with them and ended up feeding the five thousand? This seemed like a great choice – it was a pagan town, home of Jezebel. But if that was His intention, He didn't have much luck, as this Canaanite woman began calling to Him as soon as He arrived. Maybe that's why Jesus doesn't seem to be Himself. He essentially ignores the woman calling to Him, and it is only after His disciples complain and ask Him to get rid of the woman that He begins to respond, but not as we would expect. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." In other words... It's not my job. When the woman is kneeling at His feet, Jesus is less than gracious. Perhaps part of this is because the Jews and Canaanites were enemies. The Jews considered the pagan Canaanites to be below them. In fact, the first time Jesus responds to the woman, he is indirectly making a racial slur. Have you ever heard someone called a "dog"? That's the tone of Jesus's comment – "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." Yet, the woman refuses to let this mistreatment drive her away. She responds, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their

masters.” She refuses to back down and give up. For she knows that Jesus can help her daughter. It is at this point that Jesus recognizes that her persistence is demonstrating the faith she has in Him, and responds “Let it be done as you wish.” We are told that as Jesus said these words, the woman’s daughter was cured.

Today’s Gospel has two distinct messages that we can take with us for the week.

First, we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus’ mission was to all people. No matter how imperfect we are, no matter what our sins are – He loves us and died for our salvation. No matter what the demons are that we face, His power is enough to save us. All we have to do is put our faith in Him.

The second is the flip side of this... As Christians, we are called to be part of the mission and share Jesus with others. But that includes not just those we may think are worthy or deserving of it – it includes everyone we encounter. And we can’t say that it’s not our job. Jesus reminds us that when we will be judged, it won’t be about how we

treated our family and friends. Instead, it will be about how we treated our enemies, the strangers we met, and the outcasts we encountered. “As you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.” It won’t be all about the things we did when it was convenient. Instead, it will be about how we responded when we were on vacation, when we just wanted to blend into the scenery, when we were in that place where nobody knows our name, when we wanted to say, “That’s not my job.”

Lord, give us this day the faith to call upon you no matter how great we think our needs are or how lost we may be. And give us the grace to open our hearts and share your love with all we meet, especially those we find hardest to reach, and in those times when it is most inconvenient. Amen.