**20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [17th August, 2014]**

READINGS: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7 / Psalm 67/ Romans 11:13-15, 29-32/ Matthew 15:21-28

THEME: GOD’S SAVING HAND AND LISTENING EAR ARE OPEN TO ALL

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

There so many religions in the world; and even within Christianity, the number of denominations seem to increase every week. Unfortunately, associated with this phenomenon, are conflicts between adherents of different religions or denominations. For instance, in Iraq today, Christians are being persecuted for their faith. Probably, if all who believe in the One Creator-God truly realize that He is the Father of all peoples, and that He desires to save all, such conflicts may be minimized.

The Book of Isaiah expresses the fact that God’s salvation is open to all as follows:

“Thus says the Lord:

‘Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come ….Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, the Lord will surely separate me from his people…. And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants … these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer …’” (Is. 56:1-7, RSV).

Faith is what led the foreigners of old to join the Jews to worship the Living God and keep His commandments. They believed that He is the Creator-God, the only Living God. Therefore, for the ailing daughter of the Canaanite woman (a foreigner) to experience healing or salvation, she who was making the request had to express faith in God. Hence, Jesus engaged the woman in a dialogue that gradually led her to express great faith in God. Once this was achieved, her daughter was healed: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly” (Mt. 15:28). Today’s gospel reading is, therefore, not about the restriction of Jesus’ ministry or mission to only Jews. On the contrary, it speaks of the fact that God’s salvation in Jesus is for all who have faith in Him.

Most of us are not descendants of Abraham by natural blood. However, by faith, we have become the children of Abraham, the Father of Faith (*cf*. second reading). In other words, by faith the door of salvation in Jesus has been opened to us. But like the foreigners of old who, besides believing in God, led righteous life, so good works should accompany our faith in the Lord.

Furthermore, the first reading speaks of God hearing the prayers of both the faithful Jews and the believing foreigners in the Temple (His house of prayer). In the New Testament, Jesus is the new Temple (remember: He said that destroy the Temple and I will rebuild it in three days, while referring to His death and resurrection, Jn. 2:19-21). It is, therefore, in and through Jesus (the new Temple) that the Father hears our prayers.

And, as the request of the Canaanite woman was not answered at the first instance, but she was eventually answered because she persevered, so we need to persevere in prayers. Are you persevering in prayer, yet things are getting worse? Do not give up, for your answer may be one more “prayer” away! Remember, the Canaanite woman’s plight was getting worse and worse, but she did not give up until she was answered: firstly, Jesus was silent; secondly, she was told she did not qualify (for she was not part of the house of Israel); and thirdly, she seemed to have been referred to as a dog.

Beloved, if the Lord seems to be silent, continue to pray. If after a period of no answer to your prayers, your sins make you feel that, after all, you are not worthy to ask God for favours, turn your guilty feelings into confession, and pray the more! And if your situation is still getting worse, pray with more intensity! And soon the Lord will answer you: “O woman [or man], great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire”! Amen!