

August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Cycle A

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Isaiah 56: 1, 6 – 7.

*God's House will be a house of prayer for all.*

Psalm 67:2 – 3, 5, 6, and 8.

*Oh God let all nations praise you.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Romans 11: 13 – 15, 29 – 32.

*God has irrevocably called and gifted Paul to evangelize the Gentiles.*

Gospel: Matthew 15: 21 – 28.

*God heals all people, the Kindom is not limited.*

Whatever it takes!

God is good, **all the time**. All the time, **God is good**.

Today's readings could not have been more timely, in light of our country's seeming immigration policies and wall building, in light of the Nuclear missile tests in Korea, in light of the violence displayed in our own country at Charlottesville and abroad in Barcelona and neighboring towns. We have all been deemed worthy to be known as God's chosen people upon whom God abundantly cherished us with gifts of mercy and love. God calls us to do the same with our sisters and brothers no matter their sexual orientation, their race or their creed. We are, each of us, God's special child. Can we do what it takes to make this special kindom present in our world today? We need to make it happen! Repeat after me, "whatever it takes!"

Can you imagine how difficult it was for the people of Israel, God's chosen people, to hear Isaiah's words today: "Oh yes, my house of worship will be known as a house of prayer for all people." Are we listening to God speaking to us today? I believe God is clearly saying hate and violence are never the answer. Let's do whatever it takes.

St. Paul reminds us, in our reading from Romans, that God's grace and mercy is never canceled, never rescinded. As God's children we are under a full warrantee. It is the work of God that makes sure that we all have the experience

of being on the outside, so that through our persistent prayer, God can personally open the door and welcome us back in. This is a key Christian inheritance from the Israelite faith: **persistent prayer for an impossible goal yields surprising grace.**// Are we willing to do whatever it takes?

Then we come to Matthew's Gospel, one of my favorite passages, I love the spunk of this woman, who after being called a "dog" turns it to her advantage. Putting this meeting in context is important I think. Jesus was just in a "rules" discussion with the Pharisees and religious leaders where he concluded with it is not what you put into your mouth that is the problem, but what comes out of your mouth that pollutes things. From there he heads out to Gentile territory, Tyre and Sidon, for a sort of break/vacation.

Here Jesus and his disciples are accosted by a Canaanite woman, a Phoenician, a worshiper of Baal. Jesus just ignores her; but she doesn't go away, the love she has for her daughter impels her to persist. The disciples are bothered more than Jesus and want him to dismiss her; but he explains his mission as he understood it, "I have my hands full dealing with the lost sheep of Israel." So he tells her as she is begging at his knees, "It is not right to take bread out of children's mouths and feed it to the dogs." She is quick to retort, "Even dogs get the scraps from the master's table." In her reply, inspired by her love for her daughter, Jesus heard God's voice expanding his vision that his mission is to all peoples who believe. Her faith was great but her love and persistence was even greater and rewarded with surprising grace. I am reminded here of a statement Fr. Fitz once told me in spiritual direction, "You may be absolutely right about an issue but it may not be the pastoral answer/solution. Jesus was right about his mission as far as he understood it, but still able to hear the will of God through this outsider. Are we willing to do whatever it takes?"

Can we be as resolute in our prayer as this outsider woman, and remain open to God's surprising grace? What do we do when our prayer is not answered? When others tell us don't waste your time! As long as we need God's grace and help and love and mercy, we must persevere. In our Gospel today it delivered a child from evil; and today the Church's tenacious prayer will transform the world. Are we willing, say it with me, "to do whatever it takes!"

God is good, **all the time.** All the time, **God is good.**