

We Need to Seek Out the Mercy of God

A-20th Sunday of Ordinary Time August 16, 2020

Context is important. Matthew was writing to a predominately Jewish community.

As such one of the motifs of his gospel is—

God's salvation is revealed through the Jewish people.

Matthew's understanding is that Jesus did not exclude the woman as a personal insult to her, because she was not Jewish, his comment was intended to affirm the reality that salvation was through the Jewish people. Although the woman is not Jewish she persists in her faith.

And Jesus is impressed by her faith, heals her daughter,
and announces that the kingdom of heaven will be open to all people.

Salvation does come to us through the Jews...but it is open to all people.

We must be thankful for this, as most of us have not descended from Jewish heritage;
most of us have descended from Gentile heritage.

We are all called, not only to welcome others to the table of the Lord,
but we need to go one step further and invite others to the Lord.

The Roman Catholic Church is not an exclusive Church,
where one has to be born Roman Catholic to belong.

We need to invite others to become part of our Church.

This is important, because we need to remember
that the woman in the gospel was not born a Jew,
she was not born as part of the community...but she had tremendous faith.
And it is this faith that saved her daughter.

This church is full of individuals who are part of the community.

But from time to time someone enters who is not part of the community.

When that happens what is our response.

To tolerate them, to welcome them, to accept them into the community.

I have heard many, many stories, in the various parishes I have ministered in,
of people who come to Mass and no one speaks to them.

I ask you if that were to happen, would it be an indication of a welcoming community?

As early as the prophet Isaiah, there have been indications that God's house is for everyone.

We must remember that it is God's house, and it belongs to him and him alone...
it does not belong to any one particular group or denomination.

To make this point I would like to tell you a story, so sit back and relax.

Once upon a time a group of people gathered outside the gates of heaven.

They were the type you would expect to find there:
good hard working, respectable, God-fearing people. The salt of the earth.
The type of people who made the world go around.

While on earth they had moved in the same business and social circles.

As they gathered they exchanged excited greetings.

'Thank God you made it, John!' 'Good to see you, Mary!'

These and similar greetings were exchanged as they stood around waiting for St Peter to open the gates.

The thing that had amazed them was this: contrary to expectations, there had been no judgment – not that they were complaining!
Now they were sure of getting in,
they were eager to occupy their reserved places in the front rows.

Suddenly there was commotion, and a voice was raised:
“Well, look who’s coming--if it isn’t old man Jacob.”
Jacob was a businessman who, back on earth, had a reputation for meanness.
Next, an itinerant woman; who had several convictions for shoplifting.
Then, to their horror, they saw a woman approaching
who had practiced the profession of the unconverted Mary Magdalen.
She was followed by a young girl who had run away from home and gone abroad,
where it was rumoured she had an abortion.
And then came a young man who had spent time behind bars.

These late arrivals, feeling the hostility of the first group,
gathered in a little group by themselves. The looks they got from the first group!
Soon it went beyond looks.
A man turned to them and said, “What makes you people think you’re going to get in?
Surely not your own merits?”
‘Certainly not’, came the surprising reply.
‘We are hoping to get in through the mercy and goodness of God.
And if I may ask, what makes you people think you’re going to get in?’
‘A good life, of course’, came the confident reply.

Time was beginning to drag for the first group.
They started to complain to one another:
‘If people like these get in, there’s no justice. It’s not fair’.
And they began to work themselves up into a frenzy.
Then Jesus arrived. He turned towards the first group and said:
‘I understand you have been wondering why there has been no judgment’.
‘Yes’, they cried out. ‘We want a judgment. We want justice’.
‘The judgment has already taken place’, the Lord answered.
‘What do you mean?’ they asked in surprise.
‘You’ve judged yourselves’, said he.
‘By judging these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you have judged yourselves.
In rejecting them you have rejected me.
You have shown yourselves unworthy of the Kingdom of God’.

They were flabbergasted, and began to complain bitterly: ‘It’s not fair. We tried to live a good life.
But as for these dogs, they lived bad lives. We deserve to sit at the banquet table’.
‘Yes, they have done evil things’, the Lord answered, ‘but they have repented, and I am merciful.
I do not find any signs of repentance among you, however.
You have all enjoyed a generous portion of the good things of life.
You have eaten of the banquet, but I do not find in you much faith, or love, or compassion.
And these are the things which constitute the passport to the Kingdom.

‘As for these others, the ones you referred to as “dogs”, these have had to get by on the crumbs.

Take that businessman. He was no saint, but he worked hard,
and in quiet ways did many charitable deeds,
and this, in spite of knowing that he was despised by many.

And that itinerant woman. She was the mother of eleven children.
Her husband was an alcoholic. Many would have thrown the towel in.
But she showed courage and faith.

As for support from the community, she didn’t even get a crumb.

‘And that Mary Magdalen. At heart she was a kind woman.
When she got married she was expecting a feast of love.
Instead she got beating after beating from her husband.
The dog got better treatment than she got.

And this young prisoner.
He grew up in an environment in which he had to make do with crumbs.
He couldn’t get a job because of the area he came from.
And of course, once he got a record, even the crumbs were, denied him.

‘When I look into the lives and hearts of these people,
I find there more faith, more courage, more goodness, more humility,
and above all, more love than I find among you who sat down at the banquet table’.

When considering the gospel, one has to consider—
Who had the greater faith...the woman who was an outsider,
who wanted to tear down walls,
or the disciples who wanted to build up walls.
You see there are no reserved places at the banquet of the Kingdom.
There is no “Us” and “Them.”

Let us all seek out the mercy and goodness of God.