

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Thus says the Lord:

“Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

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,
all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant —
these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles.

Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles,

I glorify my ministry

in order to make my own flesh and blood jealous,
and thus save some of them.

For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world,
what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!

The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Just as you were once disobedient to God

but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,

so they have now been disobedient

in order that, by the mercy shown to you,
they too may now receive mercy.

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience
so that he may be merciful to all.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 20

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
A Canaanite woman from that region came out
and started shouting,
“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is tormented by a demon.”
But he did not answer her at all.
And his disciples came and urged him, saying,
“Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.”
He answered,
“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”
But the woman came and knelt before him,
saying, “Lord, help me.”
He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food
and throw it to the dogs.”
She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs
that fall from their masters’ table.”
Then Jesus answered her,
“Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.”
And her daughter was healed instantly.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

This passage comes from Third Isaiah, the postexilic portion of that work. It is founded on the teaching of Second Isaiah, as the opening verse of the reading shows: it uses the same terms, “justice” and “righteousness.”

On the other hand, there is a new twist to these words: justice and righteousness are not exclusively Y(HWH)'s mighty acts in bringing this people out of exile but are demands upon human conduct. Third Isaiah thus gives a moralistic slant to the teaching of his mentor.

Verses 6-7 deal with an acute practical problem that arose after the return and the restoration of the Temple. Prior to the exile, foreigners had been allowed to perform certain functions in the Temple precincts. Ezekiel had objected to allowing uncircumcised foreigners around the place. Third Isaiah now stipulates the conditions under which they may serve: they must observe the Sabbath and keep the covenant, as far as it is applicable to non-Israelites.

This is not unqualified universalism. But it is, at least in a symbolic way, a prophecy foreshadowing the universalism of the gospel. It points to the time when the Temple of God will be a house of prayer for all people; it thus points forward to the effects of Christ's redeeming work.

Mark, or the tradition before him, puts these words on Jesus' lips as an interpretation of his cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:17). John further interprets that event by taking it as an act of prophetic symbolism, declaring the replacement of the old Temple by the temple of Jesus' body (John 2:19-21). It is there that the text of Isaiah 56:7 comes to its final fulfillment.

This passage was chosen today because of the universalist implications of the episode of the Canaanite woman in the Gospel reading.

Responsorial Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Psalm 67 combines thanksgiving for the harvest with prayer for continued blessings. It serves as an appropriate thanksgiving for the continuation of the benefits the Church enjoys and as a prayer for the spread of these benefits to all nations, in keeping with the universalist implications of the Old Testament reading and the Gospel.

Reading II: Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

This passage occurs toward the end of Paul's discussion of Israel's place in salvation history, the opening part of which we read last week. Paul believes that the pattern of salvation history will run like this: First, the gospel is proclaimed to Israel by the earliest apos-

ties. But Israel rejects it, so Paul is called to proclaim it to the Gentiles. This step will provoke Israel to jealousy, and Israel will then hurry to gain acceptance before the End.

Paul's view of salvation history causes difficulties for us today. For one thing, he expected the End to come very soon. He did not think in terms of several millennia of history.

Already Matthew was compelled to adjust the early Christian perspective on salvation history. He contemplated the failure and abandonment of the mission to Israel and, as a consequence, saw the necessity of concentrating in the future on the mission to the Gentiles.

Matthew had no hope, as Paul did, that Israel would be provoked to jealousy and would want to come in. This adjustment of perspective need not surprise us. As Cullmann has shown, it is characteristic of the understanding of salvation history in both the Old and the New Testaments that it should constantly be adjusted in the light of later events.

For us, what is of permanent validity in this passage is not Paul's particular scheme of salvation history (which had to be corrected already by Matthew), but rather the great principle enunciated in Rm 11:29 and highlighted in the caption: the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. That must be the basic principle as we wrestle today with the place of Israel in salvation history.

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28

Matthew took over the story of the Canaanite woman from Mark, but with several important changes:

1. The woman is called a Canaanite instead of a Syro-Phoenician.
2. There is considerable expansion of the dialogue material in the body of the story (Mt 15:22-24).
3. Jesus praises the woman for her faith (Mt 15:28).
4. Matthew removes Jesus' saying that the children (that is, Israel) must be fed first.
5. The narrative of the woman's return home to discover that her daughter was cured of the demon is reduced to a brief statement that the girl was indeed healed (unlike Mark, Matthew is not interested in the fact that the healing was performed from a distance).

It may well be that Matthew had access to an alternative version of the healing, perhaps a more primitive one (so Bultmann and Lohmeyer). In any case, Matthew's alterations have a theological rather than a historical motivation. He shifts the interest away from the miracle to the woman's faith.

As a Canaanite, she is a stranger to the covenants of Israel (see the Old Testament conflicts between Israel and Canaan). Jesus takes the barrier very seriously. He first refuses to answer her, then announces that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. It was the woman's faith that finally overcame the barrier.

Mark and Matthew wrote for a different public at different periods. Mark wrote for Gentile Christians, showing them that salvation was first for the Jews only and then for the Gentiles. Matthew wrote for Jewish Christians, showing them that faith, and faith alone, breaks down the barrier between Jew and Gentile.

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