



### HOW INCLUSIVE IS YOUR WORLDVIEW?

There is a strong inclusive or global vision in all of today's three readings.

In the first reading, Isaiah is telling his narrow minded Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem that they don't own God. God also desires non-Jews to come and sit at his table.

In the second reading from Romans, Paul is hoping against hope that his Jewish brothers and sisters will come to accept Jesus and his inclusive vision of life. And he wants his Jewish brothers and sisters to be accepting of Gentiles. After all Paul himself had to breakdown the wall that separated him from the Gentiles.

Being the apostle to the Gentiles, for Saint Paul, was a little like Nixon going to China. Paul was a Pharisee, an ultra-orthodox Jew very concerned about purity laws, many of which involved refraining from contact with outsiders. Gentiles were the ultimate outsiders, since they thought, worshiped, ate, and behaved in ways that were abhorrent to the Jewish community. Yet after his encounter with the Risen Lord, Paul dedicated the rest of his life to living among Gentiles and sharing the Lord's Supper with them.

What made this complete about-face possible? Paul learned one vital thing when he became a believer in Jesus: that all are sinners equally in need of God's mercy. He couldn't hold onto the idea that anyone could claim righteousness before God based on behavior. This changed Paul's understanding of who he might sit down to supper with.

#### **An Inclusive Gospel**

Matthew is the most Jewish of the four Gospels. He wrote primarily for a Jewish Christian community whom he had to push to accept Gentile converts as brothers and sisters. In writing this story, Matthew is seeking to have his Jewish community be more accepting of Gentiles.

In today's gospel we can feel the tension in the air when the Gentile woman refuses to go away. The disciples want Jesus to get rid of this "blathering woman" who

keeps yelling at them as she searches for deliverance for her daughter from an evil spirit. The story even shows Jesus' reluctance to deal with her. Worse still, Jesus calls the woman a "dog". What is going on here?

Some commentators try to get Jesus off the hook for his nasty remark, but, perhaps, we need to accept the fact that Jesus, in this case, is acting like a normal first century Jew who called Gentiles "dogs".

However, the real point of this story is not Jesus and his seeming rudeness, but the woman and her wonderful tenacity and faith. She was simply not going to be put off, even by rudeness. Fr. Dennis McBride notes: "*The Canaanite woman is the only person in the Gospel who has the wit to outwit Jesus. In the end, she gets what she was seeking.*"

The tenacity and persistence of the woman should be a source of inspiration to all people who are in any way oppressed and put down. The Canaanite woman lived in a male-dominated society. She is a foreigner who ventures alone into a Jewish milieu. When confronted by a distant, and should we say rude, Jesus, she does not "sulk". Rather, she persists until she gets what she wants. She ends up, despite her background, being one of the most highly commended persons in the Gospels. Christ came for all. God really wants all to sit at his table. Finally, the woman's wonderful faith in Jesus' saving power is also a central point of this story.

#### **Tank McNamara: Number 55 Garcia . . .**

Jay Cormier offers the following two reflections on today's gospel.

*Tank McNamara, the newspaper comic strip by Jeff Millar and Bill Hinds, skewers the funny and absurd side of sports, especially the out-of-control greed behind the business of sports and the over-the-top obsession of fans with the games and its stars.*

*And sometimes Tank McNamara scores on much bigger issues.*

*In a September '07 Sunday strip, two good ol' boys, Jimmy and Tom, are walking up and down their street holding signs. One sign reads: "It's not immigration, it's an invasion!!! And the other, Honk to send them home. As Jimmy and Tom carry on their two-man protest, a neighbor walks by. "Do you mean the Garcia*

kid too, Jimmy? Number 55, Garcia?” the neighbors asks.

Jimmy stops, “Number 55 on the football team? That family of Garcias? Number 55 Garcia is a good country linebacker.”

“He’s more than that, Jimbo!” Tom says. “He’s a dang consensus all-Regional linebacker. Him and a consistent runnin’ game could lead us all the way to state!”

Him and my kid, they started third grade together,” Jimmy suddenly remembers. “How could number 55 be a . . .” Before Jimmy can utter the word, the neighbor says, “Well, third grade was about when the Garcia’s moved here from. . . Where was it they moved from?”

Tom pipes up: “Wait a minute! Is number 55 Garcia’s dad the same Garcia who works at Les’ Transmission Shop?” That Garcia’s the only man in town who can keep my ol’ truck runnin’!”

A chastened Jimmy and Tom put down their signs. “All things considered, Tom, just to be safe? Maybe we better put off makin’ anonymous calls to immigration and customs enforcement until after the state playoffs.”

As they walk away, Tom agrees, adding, “And until I can get a new truck . . .”

For dim bulbs Jimmy and Tom, the light comes on. Through the fog of their fear, they begin to realize that we are more than our names, races and origins. Every one of us possesses skills, talents and endless potential for good. The Canaanite woman in today’s Gospel is despised by the Jewish community because of her race, ridiculed as a “dog” by the “righteous” who mistakenly find some sense of superiority in her inferiority. Jesus’ compassion for her and his healing of her daughter breaks down the wall between Gentile and Jew; the prophet’s vision of a single human family, bound by what is good and just, begins to be realized (today’s first reading). May our eyes and spirits be open to see every man, woman and child as God sees them: as God’s beloved children, brothers and sisters to one another, all made in the image of God, all embraced within the heart of God.

### **Meet the modern Christian ‘archetype’**

*Who is the typical Christian? What does today’s Christian believe? What kind of an individual is the modern disciple of Jesus?*

*If asked, you would probably begin talking about people sitting right here in this church. And you’d be wrong.*

*You and I are not, by any means, today’s typical or average Christian. The average Christian in the world today is a woman from Africa or Latin America—where 70 percent of the world’s Christians now live. Her*

*family has little money. Her husband farms, and he scrounges up short-term cash jobs when he can. She tries to sell a few things at market. The children haven’t had their shots, and they are often sick. She struggles to keep them in school, where there are no textbooks. The political situation in her homeland is fragile: the national government doesn’t get much done, while local officials demand bribes. Our sister reads her Bible, and its accounts of famine, plagues, poverty, displacement and exile, tyranny, cronyism, and corruption—which seem distant to most of us in global North and West but are immediately relevant to her. The Bible is her book; her faith is her compass through a difficult life few of us can imagine. Jesus is her Savior; she thrives on his “good news to the poor.”*

*Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman challenges us to take a much bigger view of our world and the people who inhabit it. The Canaanite woman in her unwavering faith in God’s providence and this “typical” Christian woman living the Gospel in her desperate existence have much to teach us about the cross, about Gospel justice and mercy, about living a faith that is centered in humble gratitude. In honoring the goodness and love of the Canaanite mother (who, as a Canaanite, is despised by Jesus’ hearers), Jesus opens up and illuminates our vision, enabling us to see one another as God sees us. The call to discipleship demands that we look beyond labels and stereotypes to realize that every one of us is a child of God, brothers and sisters all.*

### **Reflection Questions**

1. How inclusive is your worldview?
2. In your opinion, how inclusive is our church? In what ways should she be more inclusive?
3. How inclusive is your neighborhood and the people you socialize with?

Have a blessed week,

