

August 20, 2017

There is a poem, it's called "Semantics." It goes like this;

Call a woman a kitten, but never a cat,
You can call her a mouse, but cannot call her a rat,
Call a woman a chicken, but never a hen,
Or you will surely not be her caller again,

You can call her a duck, cannot call her a goose,
You can call her a dear, but never a moose,
You can call her a lamb, but never a sheep,
Economic she lives, but you can't call her cheap,
You can say she's a vision, but can't say she's a site,
And not known as skinny, she's slender and slight,
If she should burn you up, say she set you afire,
You'll always be welcome, you tricky old liar,

Notice the difference, same animal, different way of saying it. It does apply to the reading today, I assure you.

Our first reading in Isaiah we have 500 years before Jesus, is when Isaiah lives and preaches. It is interesting because in our reading he says that Gentiles, (the hated people that the Jews have), if a Gentile follows the ten commandments, if a Gentile keeps the Sabbath holy, if a Gentile does what Jews do, then they have a right to worship within the temple and offer sacrifice on the alter. This was forbidden. If you look at the temple, the temple was built from the outside and you look in, and on the outside; no covering, you have the court of the Gentiles. They were able to go there and worship outside. It's like saying, "OK, you're not Catholic, you stand outside and worship with us". So, they had a court of Gentiles. Then if you went further in, they had different courts for the women, for the men, for the priests, until you came to a big curtain that went all the way across. Behind that was the Holy of Holies with the tabernacle that God was in; the Holy Bread, the same thing we have here. Before that it was the Ark of the covenant that was back there. The only people that could go back there were the high priests, a couple times a year. Otherwise, the penalty was death.

Here we have 500 years before Jesus, and Isaiah is saying, that God is saying to Isaiah, "No, if they follow our law, let them worship with us". Well this is unacceptable, and so, they ignored it for the next 500 years. It would be like a Baptist minister from one of the Baptist churches, ignoring John Chapter 6; "if you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will live forever, and have salvation". And they do ignore it. I talked with an Assembly of God minister one time, and she said, "where is that in the Bible"? Between chapter five and seven. They have been ignoring it all that time. It wasn't until Jesus showed up, that this became truth. In our Gospel, today we have a very very good story for many many reasons. And it's all because of the person, it warrants Jesus's attention. He is in the region of Tyre and Sidon, this is modern day Lebanon. Way above Israel. Why was Jesus and his Apostles, his disciples, outside their normal region? Even above Samaritans, the Samaritans were half Jew, half pagan. He has gone beyond that, Tyre and Sidon are completely pagan. They worship many gods. So why is He up there? Because He's on vacation. He doesn't want to be recognized, He wants to take a break from having miracles and healings and all these kinds of things. Priests and ministers need vacations, so we take them. I take mine, but

where I take them, they all know me. So, I don't get a break. "Father would you do morning Mass? Father would you do Sunday Mass? Father, you know what? The pastors out of town and we need a funeral". So, when I'm on vacation, I'm not really on vacation. There's so many people that know me in the western United States that if I tried to get in trouble, I couldn't. By the way that's what the tonsure used to be when they shaved the priests head, so that you would know that it was a priest and he couldn't get in trouble, you would report him. Even if I wanted to get in trouble I don't, ok, I don't want to get in trouble. So, we have Jesus and His disciples up there on vacation. Well, word is spread, word is spread. This woman is a Syro-Phoenician, she's a member of the Greek empire. She speaks Greek and she recognizes Jesus. Now, Father doesn't Jesus speak Hebrew, how is she going to understand? No, Jesus is what we call polyglot, He knows how to speak four languages, he had to growing up. You see, in Bethlehem, where Jesus and Joseph worked, it was right next-door to a modern Roman city being built, called Sepphoris, and they needed stone masons, they needed carpenters, which Jesus and Joseph were both and so they would walk over there to work. The language in Sepphoris was Greek by the upper people. The language on the street was Latin. Jesus spoke Hebrew on the street and Aramaic in church. Jesus, we know had four languages. So, this woman and Jesus are talking in Greek. The apostles had to know Greek too because they had to know enough of what she is saying. It's like if I go down to Mexico and say, "Taco, enchilada, cerveza". They're going to know what I want, they're going to understand, ok. I don't have to worry about any of the other words. Like dame, give me, I don't have to worry about that. So, they know a little bit. This woman comes up and surprises the heck out of all of them. How did she do that? "Lord, Son of David". She had just recognized who Jesus is. She just recognized, He's divine, He's divine. She knows a little bit about Hebrew scripture so she just said, "Lord, son of David, God would you help my daughter, who is possessed by a demon?" In pagan religions, even to today, they are demonology. You have a lot of possessions you have a lot of that kind of thing. Well the disciples say, "Jesus, get rid of her, she is nagging us to death. She won't let us alone, she keeps wanting us to go to you and ask for help". Jesus says, "I was sent to the children of the house of Israel". And, the woman comes back. She doesn't take "no" for an answer. She says a very good prayer. "Lord, help me". My Grandmother had a different one, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph child." And she had a cane. Between the two of them, you knew Grandma was upset. But, she said, "Lord, help me". This is a good prayer for us. If you can't think of anything else, if you're so upset, "Lord help me". If you're driving, "God bless you", to the person that's making you mad. And then, "Lord help me". Nice prayer. It's wonderful. We get a lot of our prayers from pagans in the Gospel. There is only one other pagan, the Centurion who wanted Jesus to go and cure his servant. Jesus said, "I will go right away", and the Centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy that you enter under my roof". That prayer was so phenomenal that we put it in the Mass. Most of our prayers come from pagans. He said it is not right to take the food from the children and throw it to the dogs. The worst insult you can say in the middle east then and today is to call someone a dog. But, they all, in those languages, even Greek, have another word even we use, pet. People think Jesus is calling her a mongrel outside of the pack. No Jesus is saying it's not right to take the food from the children of Israel and give it to the pet dog. And she smiles, because now Jesus is giving her a grin, He's giving her a hook, giving her something to hold on to. But more, even the children at the table feed their pet dogs scraps. And Jesus smiles. Why? Because this woman has just become a Christian, a follower of Christ. In this short interlude with Jesus, she has just become a Christian. And that's why He's smiling. Tremendous faith, she won't take no for an answer; perseverance. And the disciples are saying, "send her away, she's not one of us, she's not worthy to worship with us. She is not worthy of your attention, Jesus". How often have we tried to decide who God should help and not help? Who ought to be in

heaven when we get there. How many times have we thought about that? How many times? "Well, that person shouldn't be in church." Jesus came for everybody. This story shows, Jesus came for everybody. He loves us all, whether we love each other or not. He loves us and he wants us all to be with Him in heaven. That's why he died on the cross. He didn't come up and go on the cross and then underneath there is says, "I'm dying for everybody but Bill and John and Susie and Ann". There's no exceptions under there. He did it for everybody. But the disciples had fallen into that trap of judgement. Jesus shows them, He came for everybody. "Woman, great is your faith, your daughter is healed". Long distance healing. He can do that. We also see something else in this Gospel. We see intercessory prayer. We see the woman going to those that Jesus loved, those that are close to Jesus, and asking them to intercede for her. The one's that Jesus love we call the saints. We pray to the ones in heaven. "Saint Anthony, find my keys, find me my wallet, find me a green light". All these different kinds of things. "Saint Jude, my son is an impossible cause, please do something with him". All these different saints. If you're a girl, "Saint Ann, find me a man". You didn't know that one?..... Is that why you ladies think you got the wrong guy?.... You didn't pray for help from heaven? So, we pray to the saints for intercession, "please go talk to Jesus". Who is the number one we pray to? Mary, our mother, "would you please go get your Son to get me this"? Just like our own Mothers, to go for our Dads. Intercessory prayer. But here is something we don't often do. Reach out to those around us that we know and like or love. "Please, pray for this for me. Help me with this prayer. Help me with this problem". The more people you ask, the better. Because the more graces are flowing. The second thing is, never give up in prayer. We are in a culture today that it's, instantaneous gratification. Let me get it now or I'm going to go somewhere else. Jesus has always told us, "pray always, never give up, never surrender". This woman didn't. She didn't take "no" for an answer. She continually stayed at Jesus. And what's more, her body posture got a response. What did she do when Jesus said no the second time? She got on her knees and begged Him. Body position says a lot. A lot of times, if you're going to pray, get down on your knees by the side of your bed and pray. That helps you pray harder and better.

We see that Jesus came for everyone. Intercessory prayer is a tremendous thing. And, we never give up, we never surrender, and we don't judge. We don't decide who's going to be in heaven and who's not. Who is going to be in church, who's worthy and who's not. Not up to us. A junior high religious ed teacher was giving a lesson one day about heaven and about what it was and what you could expect, that kind of thing. She asked this question, "Okay class, how many of you want to go to heaven right now"? Everybody but one boy raised their hand. She looks at Peter, "don't you want to go to heaven right now"? He said, "not with this bunch".... You can't do that. We have to pray always. Our prayer life cannot be like our consumer life. We can't just say it twice and give up. You have to continue to pray. I am going to leave you with one thing to be in your head, hopefully for the rest of the day. Just keep praying~~~ just keep praying~~~. And for those of you who haven't seen that movie, it's Finding Nemo.

God bless you