

AUGUST 20, 2017



TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



ISAIAH 56:1, 6-7

PSALM 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

ROMANS 11:13-15, 29-32

MATTHEW 15:21-28

REFLECTION

Did you ever stop to consider that, in the midst of his ministry, Jesus himself didn't have it all figured out yet? Does it seem irreverent to even suggest that? Jesus is fully human and fully divine (God). It's what we call the Incarnation, and it's a great mystery of our faith. Brilliant and faithful thinkers over the centuries have tried to unpack what we mean when we say that Jesus is both truly God and truly human. Today's Gospel invites us to do the same by considering how Jesus grew in his sense of who he was in his humanity, and to whom he was sent to minister. At the beginning of the story, Jesus is unmoved by the Canaanite woman's pleas to heal her daughter. He tells her he was sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (that is, his own people; Matthew 15:24). It's jarring to witness Jesus acting so callous and insensitive toward this woman who is obviously hurting. He insults her, implying that she is a dog! But the woman persists. She turns Jesus' words upside down and something truly shocking happens: Jesus has a change of heart! He allows her daughter to be healed. The encounter with the Canaanite woman (an outsider) is a moment of conversion—for Jesus, that is. From this point onward his ministry expands to the entire world. By the end of Matthew's account of the Gospel he instructs his followers to go "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Today's lesson is about God's endless mercy being extended to all.

ACTION

Find comfort in this: Jesus grew and developed as a person, just like you and me. If he didn't he would have been faking his humanity. The Canaanite woman challenged Jesus to expand his notion of who was "part of the club." It was a turning point for Jesus' own life. Surely, there are people in our own lives as well who we choose to exclude—perhaps because they are different, they have let us down, or don't live up to our standards. And unfortunately, many people experience church as a place of exclusion as well, rather than as a place of unconditional acceptance. Isaiah says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Who could we invite into our circles this week to make them a little bit wider?

JOURNALING QUESTIONS

● Do you find it easier to identify with Jesus' humanity or with his divinity? Why are they both equally important? What can Jesus' humanity teach us about our own humanity?