

Homily: To Be a Welcoming People
Rev. Stephen P. Lintzenich
Sunday, August 17, 2008
Is 56:1, 6-7, Rom 11:13-15, 29-32, Mt 15:21-28

Good morning, Church!

What great stories we have in the Scriptures today!

They made me think about a number of things. One thing is the old couches we used to have in the back of Church. I always liked to call them my St. Vincent de Paul couches. People were always telling me to get rid of them, that they didn't look good in our church space, but you know, I stood strong and kept them here. And every day, particularly during the summer, the poor of our community would come in out of the heat and rest on those couches, taking a little nap or break from the heat.

I remember, too, the men and women who always came to our church with all their possessions in bags. They'd sit in the back, by those pillars, and many times there wouldn't be anyone within ten feet of them. But they joined us for our prayer, and they sat together with us as we celebrated here. They were and are always welcome here at St. Mary.

I've always loved stories like those we heard today, stories about who is on the *inside*, and who is on the *outside*. Here we have a Canaanite woman, a foreigner, an outsider, looking for help. "Heal my daughter, Lord!" she cries. "Have pity on me who shoulders the pain!" This foreigner, this Canaanite, this interloper, outsider, this unattached woman talks to Jesus, begs Jesus, the son of David, her Lord and master, savior, healer. How does an outsider, a pagan, fall on her knees and get such faith, even after Jesus and the disciples reject her?

What a great story of faith! The woman's daughter was healed, just like the foreigners in the reading from Isaiah, who joined themselves to the Lord and became his servants. They go to the holy mountain, and God says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer **for all peoples!**" If you observe what is right and do what is just, the foreigners, the gentiles, the outsiders, the non-Jews are acceptable on my altar and welcome in my house of prayer!

What a challenge to all Christians! That all are welcome! That God's house is open to all! Do you expose your family and your children to aliens and immigrants, to foreigners and outsiders, to the Canaanites and Samaritans? Do you teach respect and openness to races, cultures, and creeds, and ways of life, to those from the east and the west, the north and the south. "My salvation is for all," says God." Jesus died on the cross **for all!** Let all the nations praise you!

What a challenge for Jesus, too! To state his own mission, he says, "I have come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and yet Jesus finds himself healing the centurion's son, healing the Canaanite woman's daughter, talking to the Samaritan woman at the well, walking on the borders and healing Pagan demoniacs, and even withdrawing 30-50 miles away from Galilee in the lands of Tyre and Sidon and being stretched beyond "his mission" to help a pagan.

What a challenge for us! To be open to all who have such faith. We need to welcome people who have no church, who have such faith, a spirituality like the Canaanite woman's. We need to leave our doors open to strangers, to travelers, to the hungry and the poor! We need to welcome these people who hunger for Jesus' touch and just want the scraps that fall from the master's table into our RCIA and into our lives. We are called to be a welcoming people! Amen.