

20th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaias 56:1, 6-7;
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32;
Matthew 15:21-28
Little Flower - 8/16/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

One theme runs through today's readings: God invites and calls all to salvation. Through Isaias God promised to bring to his holy mountain those foreigners who joined themselves to the Lord. His house would be a house of prayer for all peoples. Because of the Canaanite woman's great faith, Jesus delivered her daughter from a demon. Paul referred to himself as the apostle to the Gentiles.

The theme of today's readings has been lived out in the Church throughout the centuries. If we look at Church history, we realize that from the beginning the Church has consistently chosen to be an inclusive church.

The first inclusive choice was made at the Council of Jerusalem. The Church chose to welcome Gentiles without making them observe the whole of the Mosaic law. Church historians believe that this choice enabled the Church to become catholic or universal. Had the Church not made this choice, the Church probably would have remained just a sect of Judaism.

A second inclusive choice the Church made was to repudiate Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a kind of spiritual elitism that would have elevated the spiritually elite over everyone else. Gnosticism would have created a caste system within the Church.

The Church was forced to make a third choice with the barbarian invasions. Prior to the barbarian invasions, Christianity demanded a high level of personal choice and commitment. With the barbarian invasions, the Church chose to welcome whole groups of peoples who had little or no knowledge and little or no personal commitment.

The implications of these three choices are clear: the Church is for all; all members of the Church are equal; and the Church is a church of saints and sinners as well as a church of the highly committed and the less committed. If the Church has chosen to be inclusive over time, today we are also called to be an inclusive Church.

Today we need to become a Church that reaches out to, embraces, and welcomes those who feel marginalized in or alienated from society and church. The marginalized and alienated might vary from community to community and from time to time. At various times and places, they might include the poor, the addicted, the elderly, especially the widowed, the divorced, the divorced and remarried, single parents, those who have had abortions, and those who are homosexual. Jesus reached out to, embraced, and welcomed the marginalized and alienated in his society—tax collectors and those known as sinners.

My brothers and sisters, the call to inclusiveness is a call to the universal Church, to the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, to Little Flower Parish, and to us individually.

What does this mean for us at Little Flower? One year when I was on vacation, I was talking to a man who is a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. This man has a wonderful sense of the Church's mission to evangelize. One Sunday he gave a sermon about the need for the parishioners to reach out to people beyond their own circles to invite them to church. The next morning one of the parishioners asked his wife, the church secretary, with some concern, what kind of people he wanted them to welcome into their church. Of course, he was challenging them to reach out to anyone and everyone. Today in our polarized world and our polarized Church, Jesus challenges us to welcome anyone and everyone. Today in the midst of the pandemic, more than ever, people need connection and community.