

20th Sunday OT – Matthew 15:21-28

All three readings today are about the non-Jews, or Gentiles and foreigners. And as Isaia reminds us, all are welcome, assuming they will "...observe what is right, do what is just. Thus says the Lord." Paul was hoping the conversion of the Gentiles **would make his fellow Jews jealous** so that they would follow the Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, that did not happen. As for the Gospel, Jesus led the woman by an unusual pedagogy to a full expression of her faith. For Matthew, this woman joins the company of the Magi, the centurion and his servant, and the centurion and his companions at the cross in anticipating the mission to the Gentiles, that was a reality in the time of Matthew.

We have heard these passages before and hopefully appreciate their message of joy and hope to the non-Jews of the early Church. That is why I would like to talk a little bit more about Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and his struggle with the Jews' rejection and the Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel. Paul's pharisaic belief that Gentiles could be saved only **by** and **through** their entrance into the Jewish religion must be taken into consideration if we are to understand the impact upon Paul of the *Gentiles' overwhelming acceptance* and the *Jews' rejection* of the gospel.

How early Paul realized that it was the **Gentiles as a group** and not the Jews as a group who were accepting the gospel, we do not know. At some point in his career, probably in the middle fifties, Paul was forced to accept the fact that the **first, that is the Jews**, would be last and the **last, that is the Gentiles**, would be first. Once he had accepted that, he began to theologize anew on the Father's plan of salvation. This led him to the synthesis what we find in the letter to the Romans, the most profound and the most theologically important of all his letters.

The first and most important of Paul theologizing was from the critical event of his **vision of the risen Christ**. This vision is mentioned three times in Acts of the Apostles, "Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me?" We should remember that Paul as a Pharisee already believed in resurrection of the dead. It was a pharisaic doctrine with OT roots in the books of Daniel, Maccabees, and Wisdom.

The Pharisees believed not only in the fact of a bodily resurrection but in the resurrection of the dead as a sign of the **coming and completion of God's promised kingdom**. Paul's vision of the risen Christ did not initiate but rather confirmed his pharisaic belief in the resurrection of the dead. What Paul's

vision of the risen Christ meant to him, however, went far beyond a simple confirmation of his belief in resurrection; it convinced him that Jesus was sent by the Father, that Jesus was the Messiah, and that with Jesus' resurrection had begun the beginning of the end—the turning point of all history, the time when **God would fulfill** his messianic promises to Israel and to the world.

I mentioned two key points, the ***beginning of the promised kingdom*** and the messianic promises to Israel ***open to the world***. This promised Kingdom of God (for Matthew, the Kingdom of Heaven), did not mean a heaven on earth, but that God would now walk among his people and personally invite us to the messianic banquet through the Eucharist. This is why Paul actually put into effect the form of the Eucharist that we celebrate now after Jesus' death and resurrection. The other key point is that this promise is open to all.

Before Paul put into effect the changes to how the Eucharist was to be celebrated, he had to first eliminate a practice that could have ended the Eucharist Celebration. Jews at the time of Jesus celebrated the Sabbath Meal ***in the home*** which was ***led by the head of the household***. On the actual Sabbath, the male Jews then went to the local synagogue and spent the morning in prayer, reading selections from the Hebrew Scriptures. The prayer format follows somewhat what we do today in the Liturgy of the Word.

The major problem with the Eucharistic Meal or Liturgy of the Meal, after the time of Jesus. The person who hosted this meal would have a meal beforehand, called the Agape Meal, or Love Feast, and sometimes it would get out of hand. They would get drunk and make the poor wait outside until this Love Feast ended. This incident is recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:7-34, where Paul tells them to drop this ***Love Feast*** before the Eucharistic Meal. And they eventually did. Soon after the Liturgy of the Meal was then moved to Sunday morning after the Liturgy of the Word, as we have it today.

In a way, we can say that with the early Church we now celebrate this wonderful gift of the Eucharist, the messianic banquet, even with all the changes throughout the centuries, with the heavenly banquet that awaits us in the next life. We are no longer just eating the scraps off the Master's Table!

We are actually eating two divine meals, ***the Word of God*** – where man cannot live by bread alone, and the meal of ***Christ's Body and Blood***!