

## **20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year A August 14, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle**

Last week our gospel ended with Peter beginning to sink into the sea, and Jesus rescued him and said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt."

Today our gospel ends with Jesus saying to the Canaanite woman, "O woman, great is your faith."

Our readings today all deal with outsiders and insiders, with exclusion and inclusion. The Old Testament puts a great deal of emphasis on being a child of Abraham. It is the Jewish people who were the chosen people. They were to avoid mingling with outsiders. There are occasional glimpses of welcoming outsiders, of all people being welcomed. In our first reading today from Isaiah we read "The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord I will bring to my holy mountain, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

The New Testament continues this exclusion. Even Jesus seems to be affected by it. In our gospel today, when the Canaanite woman approaches Jesus, he first ignores her. Then he says that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Finally he seems to be very harsh to her, and says it is not right to give the food of the children to the dogs. Some scholars would say that Jesus was simply reflecting the times he was living in, others would say that he was testing her. But Jesus sees the great faith of this outsider, and grants her request.

The greatest controversy of the first century of the church was about outsiders. Does the Church, made up initially of Jewish converts to Christianity, accept Gentiles into the church. Paul argues for their inclusion, and he wins.

Let us look at the present day. Are not so many of the world's problems about exclusion? What is our attitude toward immigrants? Do we accept them, or see them as a threat? What is our attitude toward Moslems? Are they all terrorists? What is our attitude toward third world nations, and the poor of our own country? Are they a threat to our own wealth?

Let us look at our own parish. Do we welcome outsiders? Are we welcoming to newcomers? We are working on that, trying to do better. Today we have our parish picnic. I hope many of you take the time to join the community at Polen Farm this afternoon. It is a wonderful time to be with fellow parishioners and meet new ones. The Ministry Fair, hot dog Sunday, coffee klatsch, the Chuckwagon are all attempts to make people feel part of the parish.

So many of our problems in the world, in the church, in our community are about exclusion. In our gospel today we saw that even Jesus had difficulty dealing with it. But the Lord looked into the heart of that Canaanite woman and saw a persistent but loving mother. He reached out to her, accepted her, and granted her request.

I believe that Jesus is telling us that we too must look into the hearts of others, whether they be immigrants or Moslems or the poor or just simply different, and see in them that they are all children of God, and then welcome them. If we do that, we will be people of great faith.