

Homily. 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.A. 15/16 August 2020.

St. Paul had a problem. His problem was that his mission was mainly to the gentiles, that is, to pagan non-Jewish people. After his conversion to Christ and the way of the gospel Paul spent the better part of 30 years of his life engaged in this mission, even dying as a martyr for his beliefs. Not without many difficulties and serious opposition, Paul had a fair degree of success in bringing pagan peoples to the Christian faith. However, he was a Jew by birth, culture and training. It pained him deeply that most of his own people and race had rejected the good-news he was proclaiming. Torn inside by this state of affairs Paul came to understand that mercy of God accepted by the pagans would eventually bring his own Jewish kin to faith in Christ leading to the resurrection from the dead.

St. Paul's personal drama of faith tells us that the good-news is always incarnated, meaning that it is always enfleshed in us and in our humanity. This reality can't be magically avoided or mystically escaped. It has to be accepted, worked with and, when necessary, even overcome and converted by our openness to God's Spirit, grace and mercy.

As we learn in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus the incarnate Son of God was human, fully human as we are and as our Church has consistently taught. As a Jewish man of 1st century Galilee He journeyed to Tyre and Sidon in today's Lebanon, far from the Holy Land and the home of the Chosen people. There he was met by a determined Canaanite woman indigenous to that land. She had come to believe that Jesus was the one who could help set her daughter free, bringing her healing and peace.

Jews simply did not talk to pagans, let alone a Jewish man of that era and culture condescending to talk to a foreign woman. This is the way that Jesus had been brought up within his society and the rules of His time. It was part of His humanity as we, often unconsciously, have similar rules and expectations in the game of life we're playing in Australia today.

Initially, Jesus ignored her, then said to His disciples that His mission was only to the lost people of Israel, meaning not to the likes of her. However, as you know, a parent's love and concern for their child's welfare isn't something so easily diverted. Coming right up to Him, she threw herself on the ground before Him blocking His way. To Jesus, she was like a stupid puppy dog stopping His progress, and that's what He called her. Yet, even the scraps were good enough for her she said, as long as her confidence in Jesus was rewarded and her daughter helped and healed. Unlike many of us, Jesus understood this for what it truly was, great faith, demanding that He change His mind set about her so that is what He did.

It's not the weight of our culture and various biases that defeats us in living the good-news. What does us in is that we refuse to see, grasp the new way, accepting that we can and sometimes must change in the service of God's will. Paul converted his whole life so that the nations would come to praise God. Jesus overcame His notions, seeing faith as what really mattered to God. Since we're the only gospel that most people will ever get to see or hear, the conversion has to start within us widening our views and outlook by the grace of God's mercy at work in our lives.