

## HOMILY for 20<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel & the other Readings talk about foreigners, particularly people of different faiths and traditions like the Canaanite woman & Jesus being Jewish. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

Rabbi Greenberg is sitting alone in the sanctuary of his synagogue, crying. He is clutching a prayer book in his hands & a written sheet of paper. Tears are streaming down his upturned face, & his chest heaves with sobs.

"Why, Lord?" he cries out. "Why did this have to happen? How could my son, my *only* son, destroy me like this? My, my only son, he converted to Christianity!"

And a great voice booms down from the heavens: "YOURS, TOO?"

Anyway, I don't know if you have picked up this clue in all the three readings for this Sunday or not. But, the First Reading talks about "the foreigners," the Second Reading discusses the term "Gentiles," & the Gospel mentions the word "Canaanite," which means "the foreigners" as far as the Israelites were concerned. So, why do these readings talk a lot about the foreigners? Who are the foreigners? And how should we treat them?

In our time, most people do not like the term "foreigner" because they often mistakenly associate it with negative things. For example, they assume that foreigners steal jobs from the native-born folks & bring in all kinds of crimes & bad customs. Foreigners overwhelm their school systems & drain away the resources of their social network. Foreigners cannot speak the language or contribute anything good to the American society. I'm sure there might be other negative comments about foreigners that you have heard before. Of course, people forget to mention all the taxes, hard work, and wonderful things that foreigners would contribute to this country of ours. But, let me pause here & help you see why the term "foreigners" is not that scary from God's and our Lord Jesus' perspective or the early Christians' personal feelings like Paul's. I will help you walk in the shoes of the foreigners & have some sympathy on them as our neighbors, not as scary aliens or the most hated enemies.

As you might recall, the people of God had been driven out of their homes & taken to other countries as slaves many times in the Old Testament. They knew well how it felt to be the foreigners. They were uprooted from their homeland & sent to a foreign land where they did not know much about its language & culture. They had to leave everything behind to embrace an uncertain future & start from nothing. They had to make great sacrifices & endure all sorts of hardships to survive in the foreign land. They had made great contributions of their talents & hard work to the host country & hoped that they could return to their home country someday. For this choice of life was not by their own design, but was selected for them from above. That's why the people of God had constantly been reminded in the Old Testament on how to treat foreigners since they were once foreigners themselves.

But, the people of God could have looked at their life in a foreign land as an opportunity for God to use them for a greater purpose & for them to bring others to their God. That's why prophet Isaiah tries to remind the people of God in this Sunday's First Reading as following: "...Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come; my justice, about to be revealed. The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, loving the name of the Lord, & becoming His servants. All who keep the Sabbath free from profanation & hold to my covenant, them I will bring to my holy mountain & make joyful in my house of prayer... For my house shall

be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” So, evidently the Lord wanted to remind the people of God to keep God’s covenant & stick to the Lord, not another foreign god. If they could do that, the Lord would deliver divine justice to their enemies & bring them salvation in due time. Meanwhile, St. Paul views his ministry to the Gentiles or non-Jewish people as a great opportunity to evangelize the Lord to a new group of people. He explains it in today’s Second Reading as following, “I say this now to the Gentiles: Inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry, trying to rouse my fellow Jews to envy & save some of them. For if their rejection has meant reconciliation for the world, what will their acceptance mean? Nothing less than life from the dead?” So, St. Paul believed that his rejection by the Jewish community is an opportunity for the Gentiles to welcome his ministry. He was thankful for his ministry to the Gentiles or foreigners & opportunity to save some more souls for the Lord.

However, St. Paul was not the only one who has turned to the Gentiles or foreigners for his ministry. In fact, we learned in today’s Gospel that Jesus turned His compassionate heart to a Canaanite woman who begged Him for mercy & help. She said: “Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is terribly troubled by a demon.” After His disciples tried to get rid of the poor woman & His Jewish culture pressured Him to treat her less than human, Jesus rose above those biases & extended to her a helping hand as He said, “Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass. [That very moment her daughter got better.]” My friends, if Jesus could rise above His cultural biases against foreigners, we could imitate Him & do the same. Sadly, some of us have let our politicians use us to mistreat foreigners & view immigrant like despicable lepers instead of welcoming them to America & reaching out to help them in time of need. In fact, many priests are even afraid to discuss the immigration issue with their parishioners even though our Holy Father has asked us to welcome immigrants & foreigners with love & dignity. So, unless we have the courage to do like Jesus did in today’s Gospel, we cannot consider ourselves to be His disciples.

My dear brothers & sisters, one of the great strength and precious treasures of our parish here is its diversity. I’ve been moved around our Diocese to many different parishes. But, this is the first church that I’ve seen lots of foreigners & people of different races. If we still consider ourselves to be a disciple of Jesus, we got to follow His example & rise above the cultural & political biases of our time to have a compassionate heart toward immigrants & foreigners like Jesus did with the Canaanite woman. If we can do that, God will bring us many wonderful miracles like we’ve seen in today’s Gospel & our country of America lots of great blessings in the future.