**20th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A**

August 19/20, 2017

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28

How important is it to know God, the one true God? How important is it to approach God, to search him out, to believe in him, to have faith in him, to follow him?

Many people today believe that what is most important is whether or not you are a good person, whether or not you just do your best to get along with others, don’t violate any laws, don’t offend anyone. Many today are not really looking for God and searching him out, but are looking elsewhere for meaning and answers. They look to the world, created things, the moon and the stars, to “Mother Earth” and science and technology for answers, or even to secular philosophies in which they put their faith. In other words, many worship false gods.

We all do, actually, if we look at ourselves closely.

We must put our faith in the one true God. We must search for him, reach out to him. We must come to understand that searching for God, approaching God, asking him for what we need begging him to heal us and give meaning to our lives… this is what is most important. Our gospel today seems to indicate that in the end, what matters most is that we have faith in the one true God, that we search for him and beg him to heal us. That is more important than whether we are just good people, do the right things, follow the rules, and never offend anyone.

It is not that rules and being nice to others is unimportant, because they are important. They keep us united as a community in our efforts to live peaceful lives. They demonstrate to God and others that our faith has consequences and that to know God and believe in him demand change and the building of a peaceful community.

What is Jesus telling us, then, by his seemingly harsh rebukes of the Canaanite woman in the gospel? Jesus is saying, I believe, that what comes first is faith in God, being in relationship with the true God, seeking him out, and not false gods that we have put into our lives: the world, nature, money, sports, careers, and so on. We all have our false gods. WE must let them go and approach the one true God. The woman in today’s gospel shows us the importance of persevering in our search for and reaching out to God.

We must reach out for the living God, the one God, the true God. We must reach out to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit so he can lead us to the Father to be healed. We must put our trust in him and not in the things of this world.

Many ask why there is so much despair and hopelessness in the world. They ask why so many people seem to be afraid. I think the reason is we have closed ourselves off from God’s love.

Too many of us don’t approach God and really believe he can heal our lives. If we don’t have faith in him then we are no longer open to his love. God is love. If we exclude God from our lives by replacing him with something created, then we are closed off from his divine love, and when we are close off from him his is love, we no longer are open to his love being poured into our hearts through faith in him. When that happens, we lose hope and become afraid. Yet this is exactly what so many people are choosing every day.

Without faith, hope, and love, we are lost. We lose our way. We become anxious and distressed.

The Canaanite woman in the gospel began to believe. She searched out God whom she recognized in the person of Jesus. She approached him. She begged him. She persisted in her search for healing. She had had false gods in her life, but when she heard Jesus, she put them aside. Her rudimentary faith led her to experience unwarranted, unmerited love from Jesus. Certainly, she had broken a lot of the rules and norms of Jewish law, and could in no way say she merited the miracle she needed. She was a pagan. She didn’t live right. Jesus’ sharp rebuke of her underscored the importance of knowing the true God and following him. Jesus said essentially that it does matter which religion you practice, that not all religions are equally true, but God’s love is available to anyone who believes and searches for him in faith. Jesus is saying clearly that is was her faith in him that brought her love and hope. It was Jesus, the Son of God, who would give meaning to her life and life to her daughter.

We must not fall into the trap of thinking we can abandon our faith in God and still be at peace, still have hope, still experience love. We must not replace God with something created. We must not have false gods. We must recognize in Jesus Christ the presence of the one true God, and turn to him, have faith in him, approach him, beg him every day to heal us, put ourselves at his feet in full awareness that we do not deserve his healing but we can expect it if we put ourselves into his hands. We must come to know that through faith, we open ourselves to divine love, for God is love, and through his love we can live in hope no matter what the circumstances of our lives may be.

Faith in God, experiencing God’s love, living in hope. This is the life of a disciple of Jesus. This must be how we live. Approaching God through Jesus, finding live through him, being healed, and finding reason for enduring hope.