



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023 - The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1** Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



**2** Read

**The Gospel for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023 - Jesus and the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)**

Jesus left Gennesaret and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel,' But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord, she said 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.



**3** Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

*This is an especially significant scene in two ways. Mark's Gospel was the first to be written, and Matthew edits and expands it, using other sources as well. In Mark this scene is the only explicit encounter between Jesus and a gentile – and a woman at that! At first Jesus is reluctant to do anything for her, for his mission was primarily to Israel. He puts her off, and is really quite brusque to her. However, she wins through by her persistence and her determined confidence in his power. The disciples get fed up with her shrieking after them, and ask Jesus to cure her daughter, which he does. We need to be persistent in our prayers and in our efforts. God does not grant a casual request. Secondly, this passage reveals a lot about Jesus' relationship to women and about his sense of humour: Jesus and the woman seem to tease each other with their repartee. There is the same repartee in the account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John: she stands up to him with her cheeky responses. Jesus and the woman are both obviously enjoying this playful scene. It suggests that not everything is solemn and serious in heaven, and there is room for a sense of humour!*

**Is Jesus rude to the Canaanite woman, or is he merely challenging her? How does Jesus challenge you?**

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

**4** Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church  
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**

# WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023



## First Reading: *God Saves All Nations*

### Isaiah 56:1.6-7

Thus says the Lord: Have a care for justice, act with integrity, for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifest. Foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord to serve him and to love his name and be his servants – all who observe the Sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain. I will make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their holocausts and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.

*One of the great results of the disastrous Sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the exile of the Jews in Babylon was the growing realisation that Israel had been chosen to bring God's healing not only to her own people but to the peoples of the world. "I shall lead them all to my holy mountain," promises the Lord. In the gospel we see this put into action when Jesus is manoeuvred into healing the Canaanite woman's daughter, in territory beyond the bounds of Israel. What does this mean for us today, as we live in the twenty-first century, whose watchword – as Nelson Mandela once said – is globalization? Our God is concerned for the salvation of all peoples, and it is for us to bring the Gospel of Christ to all nations. However, the Church teaches that the human person has a right to religious freedom. The Holy Spirit is at work in history and in other religions, but supremely in Christ himself - the same divine Spirit who gives life to the Church. The Church 'rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions. It regards with respect those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what it holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone' (Nostra Aetate 2).*

**How is it that believers in other religions are still saved by Christ?**

## Second Reading: *The Obedience of All Nations*

### Romans 11:13-15. 29-32

Let me tell you pagans this: I have been sent to the pagans as their apostle, and I am proud of being sent, but the purpose of it is to make my own people envious of you, and in this way save some of them. Since their rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, do you know what their admission will mean? Nothing less than a resurrection from the dead! God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice. Just as you changed from being disobedient to God, and now enjoy mercy because of their disobedience, so those who are disobedient now – and only because of the mercy shown to you – will also enjoy mercy eventually. God has imprisoned all men in their own disobedience only to show mercy to all mankind.

*It is by chance that the reading from Romans coincides with both the other two readings, for Paul is here really meditating on, and distraught by, the failure of most of the Jews to respond to the salvation promised to them in Christ. It is indeed a devastating puzzle that God should have prepared his people for the completion of his Kingdom in Christ and that, despite all this, they did not respond. But were the Jews especially unresponsive, especially rebellious? Or are they just typical of us all? One of the reasons why the New Testament makes such a meal of the failure of the Jews to respond is surely as a warning to ourselves. We have been chosen. We have been buried in baptism into Christ's death and now live with Christ's life, and yet our response is pretty lukewarm and spasmodic. To use Paul's dramatic image of the olive-tree of Israel: if the true branches can be cut off to make room for the gentiles to be grafted in, then surely the grafted branches can fail to take on the life of the vine. However, such is Paul's conviction of the power of Christ and His victorious Lordship that he never even mentions hell or eternal punishment. He does not seem to envisage that anyone could escape the saving power of Christ.*

**Are the Chosen People still the beloved of God?**

“We have been buried in baptism into Christ's death and now live with Christ's life.”

**The Wednesday Word: Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God**

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