

TRINITY 10

Isaiah 56:1;6-7

Rom 11:13-15;29-32

Mt 15:21-28

Inclusivity is a buzzword of our times but often involves the exclusion of those who hold different views from those claiming to be inclusive. This was the issue for the Jews in exile that Isaiah addressed. The prophet had promised that the Day of God's salvation was approaching as Jerusalem would be restored and the Temple rebuilt. In order to prepare for this momentous event, the Jews were required to be diligent in their worship of God and in their moral conduct. Importantly, those who were not part of the worshipping community of Israel because of their race or some form of imperfection were assured by Isaiah that if they observed the Jewish faith they would become members of the new Israel, the new people of God living under a new covenant, even though they were born a Gentile. In other words, salvation was to be opened open to those Gentiles who observed the commandments of God which he had revealed to his chosen people Israel.

Despite the words of Isaiah, those Jews who returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the city and Temple soon became half-hearted in the observance of their faith and certainly did not actively encourage Gentiles to become faithful to God and this was the situation during the time of Jesus. In today's gospel reading Jesus seems to take the same view as the Jews of his day.

A Gentile woman from Tyre approached Jesus calling him by a Messianic title, 'Lord, Son of David' and begging for mercy because her daughter was sick. Jesus didn't respond to her but she didn't give up. She harassed his disciples so much that they themselves went to Jesus and asked him to give her what she wanted because she was driving them mad. Unlike many people in the gospel story, this woman didn't want as sign, power or favours for themselves. She wanted healing for the daughter she loved. Once again Jesus gives her the cold shoulder and says his mission is only to the Jews because it is not fair to throw the children's bread to the dogs. Bread equals rescue and life. The children are the Jews and the dogs was an insulting term for Gentiles. The culture warriors weren't around in Jesus' day!

The bigotry of the Jews seems to be shared by Jesus who gives the woman a real put down but she checkmates him with razor like response. She points out to Jesus that at a meal food is not *deliberately* thrown to the street or house dogs, but they eat the crumbs that fall from the table. This woman drew Jesus' attention to the promise of Isaiah, namely that if a non-Jew professes the faith of God's chosen people Israel then that person receives God's gift of salvation. Jesus praises her and gives her what she was asking for.

The pleading mother's faith did not remove the barrier that existed between Jews and Gentiles, it overcame them. The barriers were finally removed through the death and resurrection of Jesus and his command to his disciples to go and baptise all the nations of the world.

As we know from St Paul, the Christian Gentile mission expanded through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection and those who responded were baptised and received into the Church. One important lesson we can learn from the readings today is that God's love for his chosen people Israel has never changed and it doesn't mean that he loves them less because he invites the Gentiles to respond to his love. Human parents reassure their first-born child that they are loved as much as they always have been even though another new baby has been born.

Jesus , Paul and Isaiah all stress that there is no limit to God's love but simply being born Jewish is no automatic guarantee of salvation, just as being a card-carrying baptised Christian is no automatic guarantee of salvation. No-one is excluded from his love because of race, gender or other differences that are beyond their control. What excludes us from accepting and responding to God's love and hence salvation, are the things we **can** control through the choices we make. So be careful, making right choices is a serious responsibility.

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