

16th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 8, 2024 Grace 10:30

Introduction to the day

James tells us to stop showing favoritism in the assembly, treating the rich visitor with more honor than the poor one. Jesus himself seems to show partiality in his first response to the Syrophenician woman in today's gospel. Was he testing her faith in saying Gentiles don't deserve the goods meant for God's children? Or was he speaking out of his human worldview, but transcended those limits when she took him by surprise with her reply? Either way, the story tells us that God shows no partiality. Everyone who brings a need to Jesus is received with equal honor as a child and heir.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Gracious God, throughout the ages you transform sickness into health and death into life. Open us to the power of your presence, and make us a people ready to proclaim your promises to the whole world, through Jesus Christ, our healer and Lord.

Amen.

FIRST LESSON: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

A reading from Proverbs.

The sayings in the book of Proverbs impart the collective wisdom of centuries. Speaking of wealth and poverty, these particular verses teach that those who are blessed by God should honor the poor, for they are within God's special care.

PSALM: Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD stand fast forever. (Ps. 125:1)

SECOND LESSON: James 2:1-10 [11-13] 14-17

A reading from James.

Faithful Christians do not show partiality to the rich and powerful of the world, especially at the expense of the poor and weak. Likewise, faith does not pay mere lip service to God's will. Instead, a living Christian faith expresses itself in acts of compassion and mercy for those in need.

GOSPEL: Mark 7:24-37

In Mark's gospel, encounters with women usually signify turning points in Jesus' ministry. Here, a conversation with a Syrophenician woman marks the beginning of his mission to the Gentiles.

GOSPEL MESSAGE - A Table-scrap Feast

The story of the Syrophenician woman is one of the most puzzling in all the gospels. It raises more questions than answers: Why did Jesus turn her down? Was he testing her? Was the human side of him mistaken? Perhaps Jesus was just grumpy? Unfortunately, the gospel writer did not record what Jesus was thinking, only what he said, and those words remain troubling.

But we do know that Jesus was moved by the Syrophenician woman's persistence and faith. She bravely crossed multiple barriers—gender, ethnicity, class, religion—to get the help her daughter

needed. In the end, Jesus grants her the mercy she seeks: he heals her daughter and restores their family. The woman had come begging for crumbs and instead received an abundant feast.

Who is the Syrophenician woman today? Maybe she is one of the millions who face daily violence and abuse, or perhaps the countless many who live with addiction or mental illness. She may be an asylum-seeker or refugee, reluctantly fleeing home because it's no longer safe for her family. The woman in today's gospel represents all who are outcast and ignored. This story is a powerful reminder of the inclusivity and compassion at the heart of Jesus' teachings and deeds. It is also a call to action, urging us to open our hearts and extend love and mercy to those who are marginalized or in need, just as Jesus did.

God has this amazing ability to bring about change in astonishing ways, through the most unexpected people. God's work in our lives is always surprising us, shaking up our worldview, and making abundance out of scarcity. Even when all we expect for ourselves or others are scraps, God has a larger vision: a banquet to which we are all invited.

THE PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God's good creation, and all who are in need.

Awaken in our communities of faith a spirit of radical hospitality. Encourage our churches to celebrate and embrace people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. Deepen our commitment to ecumenical and interreligious partnerships. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Bring forth water to nourish plants and animals in places suffering from drought. Renew our commitments to protect rivers, lakes, and streams, and make us good stewards of water in our homes and communities. Preserve wetland habitats and the creatures that make their homes there. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Inspire leaders of cities, nations, and tribes to lead with wisdom and humility. Bring peace among peoples in conflict especially in Gaza/Israel and Ukraine/Russia and strengthen global commitments to nonviolent solutions. Guide all who seek refuge from war to a safe haven. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Comfort all who live with chronic illness. Surround them in your tender embrace and sustain all who provide ongoing care and support. Bring hope and healing to people struggling with addiction and nourish the spirits of all who are in recovery. We especially pray for: Sandra Gagnon, Keith Weckwerth, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Elaine Yourth, Linda Boland, Glenda Panke, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Harold Yourth, Doug Sell, Danny Schultz, Bill Lorbetskie and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silences we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts, those who need your healing touch. (pause) Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Nurture in all people the gift of your creating Spirit. Inspire artists and musicians, woodworkers and quilters, poets and dancers. Revive those whose artistic wells have run dry and enliven all who doubt their creative talents. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give you thanks for all who have died and now find their rest in you. May their faithful witness guide us in our daily life with you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

BLESSING

Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

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