

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
August 17, 2008

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

Better Than I Deserve

We've had a few pets in our family: goldfish, gerbils, rabbits, cats, and, of course, Jenni's sheep. I'm definitely not a big fan of pets though, and Jenni will tell you that I'm definitely not a dog lover. But many of you probably believe the old expression that a dog is a man's best friend. And I'm sure there is some merit to it. But a dog, even though a good friend, is not the same as child. If a parent had to choose between their child and their dog, there is no question about which they would choose, unless there was something seriously wrong with the parents. In fact, my own parents got rid of our family dog when it was determined that I was allergic to it. And I'm sure there were some days when they questioned if they should of got rid of me instead.

And at the time of Jesus, the Jews were considered the children of God, and the pagans, including the Canaanites were considered dogs or sometimes they were even referred to as swine. Jesus was a Jew. He was the Son of David. His ministry while on earth was to the Jewish people. He was their Messiah that they had been waiting for, but most of them did not recognize Him. Only after His death and resurrection was the gospel message brought to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, especially through the preaching and ministry of St. Paul. We heard a little about this in our second reading today.

So, even though Jesus' statement to the woman in the gospel seems harsh, "***It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.***"; it was not necessarily inappropriate for the time. And by being a little harsh, He tested the faith of the Canaanite woman, and she passed with flying colors. She recognized Jesus as Lord, the Son of David, and humbly asked for mercy. She did not back down when He rebuked her, because her faith was strong. And Jesus granted her request. She was a dog in the eyes of the Jews, but not in the eyes of Jesus. To Him, she was like a sister, a daughter of God.

We are children of God. We are not slaves or dogs that God treats like possessions. As God's children, we receive gifts that we don't deserve.

Dave Ramsey is a financial advisor with a show on the radio; I think I've mentioned him before. And when someone calls into the program and asks how he is doing, his automatic response is: "Better than I deserve." And much to Jenni's chagrin, and that of my children, I have borrowed Dave's response and use it all the time. When my one daughter calls, she has now learned not to give me an opportunity to use Dave's line. She now asks, "What's up?", instead of "How are you doing?" But a neighbor called the other day on the phone and of course asked the usual question: "How are you doing?" And I responded, as many of you have heard me respond, "Better than I deserve."

And she protested noting all the time I spent as a deacon trying to do the Lord's work, and commented that I deserved a lot. But I told her that, although I try to do some good things, I still do a lot of wrong things and don't follow the Lord as well as she might think; that I am very much a sinner. I tried to explain to her that all that I have received from God is a gift; it is not something I have earned or deserved. I have received love and gifts from God as a child receives love and gifts from its parents; unconditionally. And I

would like to think that if, like Job, my possessions, health, and family were all lost, that I could still answer that I was better than I deserved.

We are all brothers and sisters of Christ, adopted sons and daughters of the Father. We are not slaves or dogs. We need to have faith in Jesus; have faith in the Father's love. Even though we are sinners, God wants us to enjoy eternal life in heaven. Jesus paid the price for us because we cannot earn heaven for ourselves. Jesus did it for us so that when we die, we can be in a place that is better than we deserve.

Deacon Joe Hulway