

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 2014  
(9am & 11:30am Masses)

Rev. Frederick Daley  
All Saints Church  
Syracuse, NY

Jesus and the Canaanite Woman!

Our assigned homilist for this weekend, Nancy Ring, found out Friday evening that she had to go out of town this morning. Her homily is on our website and there are copies available in the Greeting Area. It is an excellent reflection on today's challenging Gospel. In her place, I offer the following reflection.

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I think if we're honest, we admit that as human beings we are basically 'tribal' – we belong to families and classes; and each 'tribe' to which we belong has its own boundaries and limits, rules and expectations – and we like that! There are many alluring benefits of our 'tribalism:'

We like the order of set limits and defined practices so that we don't have to decide for ourselves what the right thing to do is. The less reason there is for doubt – the better! And we find safety in our 'tribe:' we know where we stand. It's good to know there are people who think and believe as we do. But there are some problems:

We get pretty defensive about our 'tribes'. We believe we've got it right, we've got it figured out, we're convinced that God is on our side and we can't imagine anyone not thinking or seeing things the same way we and our 'tribe' do!

Our 'tribe' may be family: ...I can recall in my family, for 40 years my mother peeling tomatoes – and complaining about it! ... because on my father's side of the family: "we always peeled tomatoes!"

Our 'tribe' may be social: ... think about those "foreign" kids at the border seen by some to be bringing disease and crime – and the protest signs declaring: "No illegal dumping..."

The 'tribe' may be political: ...just look at our Congress!!!

Or: the 'tribe' may be religious: ...often times, I think, our religions are the most 'tribal' of all, the deepest offenders. Christianity is full of people who maintain:

"If you don't know Jesus the way I know Jesus – then you don't know Jesus at all!"

or:

"If you don't love God the way I love God – then you don't love God at all!"

or:

"If you don't think what we think about this or that issue – then God doesn't want you on our team!"

So: we refuse to open our 'tribe' to include anyone outside. You can be part of us – but: on our terms. Compassion and forgiveness, and - God forbid - compromise are seen as betrayals of what our 'clan' stands for. In fact, our sense of righteousness gives us permission to ridicule you, diminish you, bully you, exclude you, even: destroy you... . "If only everyone was like our 'tribe' – how much better off the world would be!"

At least we think so!!!

But, let's take a glance at our world today:

In Iraq: The Sunni Tribe..., the Shia Tribe... the persecution of the Yazidi Tribe, and now the ISIS "Tribe" – with all the violence they can muster – convinced that God is calling them to create an Islamic State, no matter the cost...

In Ukraine: the Russian "separatists"... and in the U.S. in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson: ... ..

and the list goes on...

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Today's Gospel focuses directly on the issue of 'tribalism' and Jesus is right in the middle of it.

Jesus is from the Tribe of Israel and the woman is a Gentile: a Phoenician, a Canaanite the traditional enemy of the Jews. She is from "the other side of the tracks" and she knows it and so does Jesus!

But this woman crosses the line, steps over the boundaries: "*Jesus, I've heard about you. My little daughter is so sick and I know that you can help her...!*" Jesus – at first – remains silent, apparently startled that this Gentile would be speaking to him. The disciples react – as they seem to have a habit of doing – by calling Jesus to get rid of this crude, vulgar woman shouting at him.

But the woman persists... and Jesus replies: "*I was sent only to the take care of the lost sheep of Israel;*" and yet, she *continues to persist* and calls him "Lord" or, we might say: "Sir." He responds in what only can be interpreted as an insult: "*It is not right to take the food of children and throw it to the dogs.*" WOW!! That's pretty tough language – but still the woman doesn't give up:

*"Please, Lord, please, please! For even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of the master!"*

Then, sisters and brothers, Jesus finally 'gets it' – he gets out of *his* Tribal Box – the boundaries are gone; divisions are melted; the prejudice disappears and stereotypes and myths fall apart: God's vision of universality becomes clear! ...and with *that* vision, in love and compassion, Jesus then replies:

*"Oh woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!"*

... and "*the woman's daughter was healed from that hour!*"

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Brothers and sisters, could it be that in this Gospel story, the persistent woman *teaches* Jesus? ...awakens Jesus to his Father's will? ...gets Jesus out of *his* Tribal Box to see his mission more clearly: that he has come to save us all? ...that we're all sisters and brothers; all children of the *one* God?

What might all of this say to us as disciples of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? ...as members of All Saints Parish?

First: It's not easy to get out of our 'Tribal Boxes' ...it's in our DNA... it was *even hard* for the human Jesus! And, our religion can become our most self-righteous 'tribe' – blinding us to the truth that will set us free. But getting beyond 'tribalism' is an absolute requirement for the disciple... the follower of Jesus. It's not an option, but is essential. To be faithful to Jesus, we must *constantly* strive to become persons who "cross the tracks" and a Parish where all are welcome in deed – as well as word.

Who are the persistent voices calling out to us today?

Secondly: Our world of '*tribalism*' and *independence, individualism* and *nationalism* – isn't working! We all need to get out of our 'Tribal Boxes' and begin to see that: if humanity is going to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the growing recognition our common *humanity*; our interdependence; our universal *brotherhood and sisterhood*: ... our all-embracing kinship is key to that survival.

Jesus and the Canaanite woman can show us the way.

Amen