



August 20, 2023

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord... I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer."*

Isaiah 56:6-7



Dear Friends,

Contemporary discussions about citizenship, of who belongs and who does not belong, are as old as humanity. We divide ourselves into families, tribes, nations, religions, political parties, and myriads of organizations that give us identity and responsibilities. Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus knew well it is difficult to free people from their ethnocentrism—the pride of being in an exclusive group.

Our readings from the Prophet Isaiah, Paul's Letter to the Romans, and the Gospel of Matthew ask us some important questions of our identity and how we relate to others. Do we see the world in terms of clear divisions? Or do we see the world in the process of growing unity? Where are the boundaries of our solidarity with others? Can we be one with those who are different from ourselves? Or do we try to make everyone into us? Does membership in the body of Christ call us to new kinds of relationships?

In the time of Isaiah, the Israelites defined themselves as "descendants of Abraham, people of the Covenant, and God's chosen one's." Isaiah wanted his people to realize that their privileged calling was not for themselves but for the sake of the world. In today's passage God tells the people he will lead "foreigners" to God's holy mountain. These "foreigners" would know the joy of knowing God. This is a difficult message for a people that saw outsiders as polluted.

In our reading from the Letter to the Romans, Paul is a faithful Jew. Yet he has a special mission to the gentiles, non-Jews. He wants his people to understand the mission of Christ is to unite both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, the mission is to unite all people in Christ. Each is shown the mercy of God in their own unique way.

Our passage from Matthew comes immediately after Jesus taught that strict observance of the law was of less importance than the attitude of one's heart. After this Jesus goes into pagan territory seeking some peace and quiet from the Jewish crowds. Instead of rest he is besieged by a persistent, foreign woman. She keeps calling after Jesus. He ignores her as typically a Jewish person of that time would. She keeps call after him, using the title that recognizes him as the Messiah.

The disciples tell Jesus to send her away. (This was what they said to Jesus about the crowds when Jesus challenges them to feed them.) She has two strikes against her—she is foreign, and she is a woman. Jesus seems to treat the woman's request as if it is a temptation diverting him from his mission.

Her love for daughter compels her to kneel before Jesus and say, "Lord, help me." Notice she uses a title of reverence. Instead of responding to her need Jesus asserts that his mission of deliverance is for the descendants of Israel. Using a common insult he dismisses her, "Dogs don't eat from the table." The audacious woman turns the slight around. She mischievously reminds Jesus dogs are cleverer than sheep, she could be contented with the scraps. You can almost see Jesus say, "touché, your daughter will be alright!"

This year in October will be the Synod. A couple of years ago the whole Church had listening sessions. Out of those comes the working document for discussion. The document tells us that a Synodal Church, a Church that walks together, is a "Church of encounter and dialogue" with believers of other religions, and with other cultures, and societies. This is nothing less than the work of Christ uniting all creation in its immense diversity.

Peace,

*Ft Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*