

*The long term biblical perspective in a short-term culture.*

Homily for August 19, 20, 2023  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

Our readings for today, invite us to look at life with a long term biblical perspective. However this long-term perspective is very hard for us to live by, because our modern world is a short-term culture. New products come onto the market every day. New headlines grab our attention every day. New secrets-to-happiness come out on TV talk shows every day. But immediate gratification and the quick fix are not God's style. God's perspective includes eternity, and he wants us to share that perspective.

This comes across clearly in the First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah. That prophecy speaks of God's plan to bring salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. But the Good News of that plan didn't reach the Gentile nations until St Paul started preaching it to them - five-hundred-years later. That's long-term planning! But that's how God thinks.

It wasn't easy for Jesus' earliest followers to grasp this. They were hoping that Jesus would be a short-term revolutionary liberating Israel from Roman oppression like a political genius. This is why they were so disoriented by Jesus' passion and death; it looked like a failed revolution. But gradually, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they did learn to think as God thinks, taking a long-term perspective. St Peter, maybe the most impulsive of the Twelve Apostles, learned it especially well. In his Second Letter he answers critics who are disappointed that Jesus hadn't come again already:

***"But there is one thing, my dear friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not being slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is; rather is he being patient with you, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody to be brought to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8-9).***

So the question for today's homily is: How do we cultivate a long term biblical perspective in a short term culture? Today's readings address this in three ways:

- Isaiah and the Psalm affirm God is faithful to his vision
- Romans tells us that God will fulfill his vision
- Matthew tells us that Jesus invites full participation in that vision.

So we need to begin by asking: "What is the Vision"? Peter stated it clearly. God is so patient with us because he wants everyone to be brought to repentance. This means he wants every person to know of his merciful and saving love, so that in the end all people have the opportunity to share in the fullness of eternal life. He does not want anyone to be lost to him.

With this in mind let's see first, how God is faithful to this vision. Today's Psalm expresses God's faithfulness this way:

***"May your way be known upon earth and your saving power among all nations"***

Has God been faithful to this vision? Remember that at the time this Psalm was written the Lord had a special relationship with the Jewish people – that he had made known his saving power to them alone. But look at us gathered here today. We are evidence that God has been faithful to this vision because in this very Mass the saving power of God is proclaimed. But there's more.

Remember that for the Jewish people only faithful Jews could enter the Temple to worship God. But listen to the vision Isaiah has about the universal nature of God's saving message and love that includes all.

***And the foreigners.... I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.... For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.***

Oh and there is one more thing. Only Jewish men who were of the lineage of Aaron could serve as priests. But listen to Isaiah's words:

***And foreigners will join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant.***

Now in these verses the word used for "minister" is a technical term that means to serve the Lord as priests. These foreigners will serve at his altar. Has God been faithful to this vision? Indeed he has, look at me. And again look at us and these words from Psalm 67:

***"Let the peoples praise you O God, let all the peoples praise you"***

All around the world today are non-Jewish priests serving at the Altar so that peoples from hundreds of different ethnic groups are praising the Lord. Isaiah and the Psalm clearly state God is faithful to his vision and we are evidence of this faithfulness.

St Paul in today's reading from Romans declares God will also fulfill his vision. What the Apostle is conveying is God's commitment to staying on task. It never forgets the vision. Both Jewish people and non-Jewish people at different times have been disobedient to God's call to respond to his saving love. At the heart of the passage from Romans 11 is this sentence:

***The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.***

This means that God's vision cannot be changed and he no way regrets his plan to include for all people the possibility of salvation. In the second paragraph of today's reading St Paul first of all refers to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish peoples', and states that just as you were once disobedient and have now come under God's mercy; so too in God's great vision the day will come when the Jewish people will know the mercy in Jesus Christ, this is because God's vision is one that is meant for all people. That is why St Paul says:

***"God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all".***

Now there is one more point to be made about God's fulfilment of his vision. It is stated by St Paul this way:

***Now if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?***

What does this mean? Remember in today's Gospel Jesus says to the Canaanite woman that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel? This means that when Jesus was here in the flesh, his primary mission was to the Jewish people. They were the primary focus of his merciful love. However because there was an overall rejection of Jesus by his people this became the opportunity for non-Jewish people to hear and respond to the Gospel and so fulfill the vision of Isaiah 56 – today's first reading, and the Psalm 67. Now St Paul states that when there is a greater response by the Jewish people to Jesus "their acceptance" this will mean "life from the dead". That is the Resurrection of the Dead – the ushering in of the Second Coming. Therefore what St Paul is saying is that God will not fulfill his vision without the inclusion of those people – the Jews – on whom he first directed his merciful love. The Catechism of the Catholic Church at paragraph 674 puts it this way:

***The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel"*<sup>1</sup>**

So we have seen how God is faithful to his vision, that one day he will fulfill that vision with the full inclusion of the Jewish people; this means that in the present Jesus wants full participation in sharing in this vision.

And this brings us to the Gospel. Time does not permit me to go into detail about this reading. What I want to emphasize is that while on first reading it seems Jesus is dismissive and even hostile towards this woman, he is in a way testing her faith. The woman address Jesus with honorific titles:

- ***Lord, Son of David***
  - ***Lord help me***
- ***have mercy on me Lord***

As well, this woman is persistent. When she is rebuffed either by the disciples of Jesus or challenged by Jesus she never gives up. This tells us something about faith as well. Although Jesus wants all people to fully participate in his vision, it requires perseverance on our part. Jesus' love and mercy are priceless but they are not cheap. We are to engage with the Lord and truly desire him, we are to seek him like this woman. However this is where we are so challenged. Because we live in a short term culture we can so easily walk away from Jesus and

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Church. (2000). [\*Catechism of the Catholic Church\*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 176). United States Catholic Conference.

give up. However what he is inviting us to is a relationship where we engage with him. As we do so, we will come to realize the gift of the long term biblical perspective in a short term culture.

The 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop St John Chrysostom is commenting on this woman's faith said she embodies trusting persistence in prayer. He writes:

*...but when the woman herself cried out begging for this favor he granted it. And, at the beginning, when she first made her request, he did not answer, but after she had come to him once, twice, and a third time, he gave her what she desired. By this he was teaching us that he had withheld the gift not to drive her away, but to make that woman's patience an example for all of us.*

Such I pray will be an inspiration to each of us here today. God knows his vision and it is irrevocable. This is because he is faithful to his vision, he will ultimately fulfill it and invites full participation in it.