

Rev. Toan Do
Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7
Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15: 21-28

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH
Louisville KY, USA
August 16, 2026

Thirty-three or thirty-four years ago my family immigrated to Louisville, Kentucky and we have settled here since then. Though I am the only one in my family, by God's blessings, that happened to travel and live in other places, the majority of my family to this day still live in Louisville. Coming to Louisville from Vietnam; just imagine thirty-four years ago, we really did feel like foreigners to this town. After so many decades now with having my experience of living here and there, that feeling is almost gone. However, by contrast, today when I see someone struggle as many Americans do too, when I see someone who is visiting us from another country or see someone who is coming here from another place, I feel, am I one of those, should I treat that person the way that I was treated thirty-four years ago?

Three readings today; not only from the gospel of Mathew, the first reading from Isaiah, and Paul's Letter to the Romans, the concept or at least the words that signal foreigners, Gentiles, and those who live outside of the circle of comfort. Outside of our own circle, say neighbors appear in the scripture reading today. I was wondering whether the concept of foreigners, Gentiles, or not of one's own; is that God's concept or is that human's concept? If it is not God's concept, is it something that God created and inherited in the way we all live? I dare to say, it is more or less a human concept to separate one from the other because that's how we learn to treat ourselves and those around us by the measure of who we are and how easily we love and care for one another, which we show to those who are not aligned with us. Example, politically or economically, we see them as different.

In today's gospel, three times Jesus encountered this woman, for her to call Him, Lord, Son of David, help me. Of course, growing up in Galilee, Jesus was behaving like one of the Jews in His time, treating other non-Jews as foreigners. Because three times, she called out Lord, Son of David. We also learned the way Matthew put this story for us implies that at least for Jesus and at least for Matthew and his audience, the distinction between foreigner and Jew was very clear, and for centuries up until the time of Jesus. I would also dare say, including Jesus Himself to some extent, the distinction between a Gentile, a foreigner, and a Jew, who has

been promised by God salvation continue to this time. As Paul tells us in the Letters to the Romans, in the second reading today, we see that in Matthew, the word Lord implies a human person, of course, the title Lord in our own time we may translate it as sir or master. It is still for a human being.

Already up until this time, we recall, even though Matthew tried to make a distinction between Gentiles and Jews; Gentiles seem to come to receive grace and mercy from Jesus. Recall at the very beginning of the gospel of Matthew in chapter two, in the story of the infancy narrative when the three magi from the East come to Jerusalem hoping to pay homage to the baby Jesus. Also, in chapter eight, another story in which the centurion, a Roman soldier, whose servant was paralyzed, came to Jesus asking Jesus to heal his servant. This is the third time in Matthew's gospel, the Matthew story. This time a woman in Mark, she is called a Syrophenician. In Matthew, she is a foreigner from the region and district of Tyre and Sidon. She came to Jesus and because of her persistence in faith, in hope that her daughter would be healed from possession of demons.

Another question or another thing for us to ask, is how did this woman, how did the centurion, the Roman soldier, and how did the magi receive the understanding or the knowledge that Jesus would be able to provide need for them? There must have been some revelation given to them. Also, recall last week in the gospel when Jesus was walking in the Sea of Galilee at night in the fourth watch of the night, disciples who were on the boat and Peter himself asked Jesus to come toward him. At first, he was able to do so. After looking around, the waves, and the challenge around him, he began to sink. Jesus called him, "Why did you doubt?" By contrast, in today, a foreigner, a woman of the district of Tyre and Sidon was able to call out to Jesus as Lord and Son of David.

By contrast, Matthew is trying to tell us that already in this time of Jesus' ministry, foreigners, as Isaiah tells us hundreds of years before, and Gentiles, as Paul tells the Romans in the second reading today, also this woman, they all already began to receive some revelation from God about Jesus. It seems, at least in my mind, that revelation was not complete, not yet to the point to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God. That title, that proclamation, we will hear next weekend from the lips and the mouth of Peter. Waiting for that confession. For us this weekend, as I asked earlier, is the distinction between foreigners, Gentiles, and Jew, is that a human concept or is it something that God created, all people? Remember in today's refrains, we listened and sang the refrain, "Oh God, let all the nations praise your name. Let all the nations praise your name." If we can say from scripture, it is human, including Jewish people, including us today, who make the distinction, not God. In the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, Paul said, "I am speaking to you, Gentiles, as much as I am the apostle to the Gentile. I glory in my ministry in order

to make my race, namely my Jewish race, jealous, thus save some of them. For Paul yearning to bring the gospel, the good news about God who saves all people through Jesus Christ. Paul also hopes that many of his race, his Jewish race, would be like Gentile, confessing and proclaiming Jesus later on to be raised from the dead. God who raised Jesus from the dead is the message of salvation.

The three readings today challenge us, at least in my mind. When we see someone who is different than us, do we treat or do we want to treat that person apart from who we are? We all belong to that feeling. Sometimes, even though our hearts tell us not to do so, the weakness in our nature always pulls us back and we do things that are not good for us. Let all nations praise the name of God. Let the Gentiles, let the foreigners, let this woman in this scripture gospel today from the region and district of Tyre and Sidon praise the work of God through Jesus Christ. Seeing Jesus, knowing what He was able to do in the name of God, she came to believe that God could do for her the need for her own daughter. Seeing what Jesus could do for our lives. Seeing God and His power, we may come to proclaim and praise the name of God.