

## 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time/Rite of Candidacy for David Pinto

August 19/20, 2017 St. Ann Parish, Augusta 5:00 p.m. (Vigil)

What a pleasure to be with you here at St. Ann Parish on this beautiful Saturday evening, getting very close to end of summer vacation, with some of our schools at all levels about to begin the Fall semester this coming week. And of course, it's hard to not be getting pretty excited about the big total Solar Eclipse just a couple days from now. It's amazing to me how that event has become such a huge attraction for just about everyone, right up there with the ever-increasing Power Ball Lottery Jackpot, now worth more than \$600 million. While it's certainly understandable that these kinds of once-in-a-lifetime, extra-ordinary occurrences attract great attention and cause quite a bit of excitement, the reality of our lives is lived out day in, and day out in the ordinary experiences of life.

The Scripture Readings we have just heard proclaimed help us to come to see how God reveals His extraordinary love for us through the ordinary realities of life, and how God tries to tear down the artificial barriers we put up to separate ourselves from one another.

We heard Isaiah the Prophet speaking on behalf of the Lord God and teaching this truth: *“Observe what is right; do what is just, for My salvation is about to come, and My justice about to be revealed.”* It doesn't matter who you are or where you live; this teaching from God is a universal truth for all people to listen to and to live by. The Chosen People thought they were someone special, and of course they were; but they were not exclusively loved by God. God, Who created ALL people, constantly shows that He loves all people. And so, probably much to the chagrin of the Chosen People, Isaiah goes on to say, on God's behalf: *“The foreigners I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in My house of prayer.”* God goes on to say that the sacrifices and burnt offerings of the foreigners will be just as acceptable as those of the Jewish

people, and concludes this passage by saying again: "*My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

In today's Gospel passage, we see that Jesus has traveled outside His own area of Galilee and entered into the region known as Tyre and Sidon----it was considered "foreign territory"; the home of pagans---the unclean Gentiles. And almost immediately, Jesus is approached by a Canaanite woman of that district, which presents two BIG problems: first, she is a woman, and secondly, she's a foreigner. Men do not associate with women in public; and good practicing Jews have nothing to do with pagans/Gentiles. The woman, in the meantime, does not let any of those labels, distinctions, or differences keep her from going right to Jesus because she was convinced that He could help her daughter----that He could heal her of her terrible infirmity, being afflicted by an evil spirit that was killing her. At first it appears that Jesus was refusing to help, or at least was not being very responsive to her pleas. But her persistence, along with of course Jesus' divine compassion, brought Him to overlook any divisions between them and to say: "*O woman, great is your faith!*" and St. Matthew concludes the account by telling us that her daughter was immediately cured---just with that extraordinary word. A powerful and extraordinary miracle taking place in an ordinary, though quite unorthodox, interaction between Jesus and a woman in need.

In the ordinariness of our world, we are currently experiencing an extraordinary and growing sense of division between people both in our own country and among more and more people throughout the world, with extremist and separatist ideologies leading to terrorism, violent protests and great intolerance and alienation with those who do not agree with them.

As we're gathered here for the celebration of God's Presence among us, and as we identify ourselves not only as people of faith---sons and daughters of God, but also brothers and sisters in Christ, we have to be the ones to recognize how wrong these divisions among us are. Look

at all the differences among us here; we're old and young, people representing several different ethnic backgrounds; perhaps people with different languages as our first language. But in God's sight, we are one. And we, as God's people, must see people as God sees them!

What we are seeing more and more in our world as is being reported in the news gives evidence to the dangers resulting from focusing on what divides us or what separates us; we must focus on what unites us and what will be for our common good. Focusing on divisions is what leads to divided houses, divided countries, and will lead to ongoing violence, hatred and even war.

What did we just hear our Lord God say through Isaiah? "*The foreigners I will bring to My holy mountain----My house shall be a house of Prayer for ALL people.*"

Parents hold a critically important responsibility in helping their children to acknowledge differences, both good and bad, while trying to allow the differences to strengthen us and work for unity. As children prepare to return to school, especially in high school and college/university, they need to be prepared for dealing with the differences they will encounter and be able to keep true to their own self while being enriched by the experiences of diversity. And the best way to make sure that they can do that is by remaining strong in the practice of their faith, and trusting in their relationship with Jesus, our Savior. The only thing that can separate ourselves from faith in God and love for Jesus is ourselves

We heard St. Paul in today's Second Reading teaching about God's abundant mercy to all people. Paul says that God's gifts and mercy are never lost. Even when we sin, St. Paul says that God has allowed us to enter into disobedience so that He could show us mercy! There is nothing that God will not forgive; as St. Paul said so powerfully: "*The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!*" But He can't forgive us if we don't ask; He can't reassure us of His love if we refuse to come to Him for Mass, for prayer, for forgiveness.

Just as parents have a very important responsibility to prepare their children, to help them to not allow prejudice and hatred to blind them in the way they perceive other people, so too does the Church have a responsibility in helping us all to see that God wants us to see people as He sees us. And that is one of the most important responsibilities of priests, who are ordained to bring Christ to us in His Word, in the Sacraments, and in the Teachings of the Church.

The primary reason I am here with you this evening at St. Ann Parish is because one of the members of this parish community, David Pinto, has heard God calling him to be a priest for a very long time. David was in the seminary formation program some 45 years ago, when he had to leave the seminary to return home here to take care of his family. As the oldest of 12 children at the time of his father's tragic death, David chose to return home to help his mother and to help raise the rest of the family. But God's call has never left him, and so he'll be returning to the Seminary formation program in just a couple weeks to attend Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit as a seminarian in his first year of the four-year Theology graduate studies. And as such, he becomes a candidate for Holy Orders, possibly to be ordained a deacon, God willing, in three years, and a priest in four years. Therefore how appropriate that in just a minute at the end of this Homily, I will celebrate with David what is called the Rite of Candidacy, and we will all get to participate in witnessing David assure us that he is ready to prepare himself completely and single-heartedly as a Candidate for Holy Orders. We are all very happy for you, David.

Today, God's Holy Word in the Scripture Readings we have just heard tell us that the direction we are going----the tendency to let differences divide us, and various opinions lead us to violence and hatred, is absolutely opposed to what He calls us to do. We must join together, with all so-called "foreigners", that is with all who are different from us, and come----together---to God's "House of Prayer" on His "holy mountain", and there, or should I say here in this "House

of Prayer” find our unity with all people. God’s universal directive remains the same: “*observe what is right, do what is just. My justice is about to be revealed.*”

Just as the Canaanite woman overcame any and all obstacles that stood in her way of coming to Jesus because she knew He could help her in her need, so we too must continue to come to Jesus, in spite of all the problems and challenges of our ordinary lives, so He can give us what we need. May He say to each of us what He said to the woman: “*O you of great faith! Let it be done to you as you ask!*”

God bless you!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley