

## **Introduction**

James tells us to stop showing favoritism in the assembly, treating the rich visitor with more honor than the poor one. Jesus himself seems to show partiality in his first response to the Syrophenician woman in today's gospel. Was he testing her faith in saying Gentiles don't deserve the goods meant for God's children? Or was he speaking out of his human worldview, but transcended those limits when she took him by surprise with her reply? Either way, the story tells us that God shows no partiality. Everyone who brings a need to Jesus is received with equal honor as a child and heir.

## **Prayer of the Day**

Gracious God, throughout the ages you transform sickness into health and death into life. Open us to the power of your presence, and make us a people ready to proclaim your promises to the whole world, through Jesus Christ, our healer and Lord. **Amen.**

## **First Reading: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23**

*The sayings in the book of Proverbs impart the collective wisdom of centuries. Speaking of wealth and poverty, these particular verses teach that those who are blessed by God should honor the poor, for they are within God's special care.*

<sup>1</sup>A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,  
and favor is better than silver or gold.

<sup>2</sup>The rich and the poor have this in common:  
the LORD is the maker of them all.

<sup>8</sup>Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,  
and the rod of anger will fail.

<sup>9</sup>Those who are generous are blessed,  
for they share their bread with the poor.

<sup>22</sup>Do not rob the poor because they are poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate;

<sup>23</sup>for the LORD pleads their cause  
and despoils of life those who despoil them.

## Psalm 125

<sup>1</sup>Those who trust in the LORD are | like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be moved, but stands | fast forever.

**<sup>2</sup>The mountains sur- | round Jerusalem;  
so you surround your people, O LORD, from this time forth for- | evermore.**

<sup>3</sup>The scepter of the wicked shall not hold sway over the land allotted | to the just,  
so that the just shall not put their | hands to evil.

**<sup>4</sup>Show your goodness, O LORD, to those | who are good  
and to those who are | true of heart.**

<sup>5</sup>As for those who turn aside to crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away with the |  
evildoers; but peace be | upon Israel.

## Second Reading: James 2:1-10 [11-13] 14-17

*Faithful Christians do not show partiality to the rich and powerful of the world, especially at the expense of the poor and weak. Likewise, faith does not pay mere lip service to God's will. Instead, a living Christian faith expresses itself in acts of compassion and mercy for those in need.*

<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>2</sup>For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup>and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," <sup>4</sup>have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup>Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

<sup>8</sup>You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [<sup>11</sup>For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup>So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup>For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.]

<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

## **Gospel Reading: Mark 7:24-37**

*In Mark's gospel, encounters with women usually signify turning points in Jesus' ministry. Here, a conversation with a Syrophenician woman marks the beginning of his mission to the Gentiles.*

<sup>24</sup>[Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,<sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup>Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup>They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup>He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup>Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." <sup>35</sup>And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup>Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup>They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

## Prayers of Intercession

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying "God in your mercy," and responding, "hear our prayer."

*A brief silence.*

Holy One, you bring your people together in worship. Enliven your church. Guide all evangelists, preachers, prophets, and missionaries who seek to share your love through word and deed. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You provide water for thirsty ground and sunshine to feed hungry plants. Bless all who advocate for healthy forests, unpolluted air, and clean waterways. Inspire all people to show care for the world you have made. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show no partiality. Increase justice in all nations. Encourage leaders and governments to work with one another for the good of our common world. (*Especially as we celebrate Labor/Labour Day,*) unite us in seeking the health, safety, and dignity of all. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You accompany those who are most in need. Shelter all fleeing violence or persecution, protect any who are in danger, and sustain them through uncertain and unstable times. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You support the work of your disciples. Continue to nurture the leadership and ministries of this congregation (*especially*). God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You embrace all who have died in the faith and brought them into your glorious presence. We thank you for their example and rejoice in their lives. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## ***A reflection for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost...***

### God Is Partial

Again and again throughout biblical history, God is partial to caring for the poor, the weak, and the outcast. Which is why, perhaps, Jesus' response to the Syrophenician woman takes us by surprise: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27).

The Syrophenician woman acts in faith. She engages Jesus with what she believes to be true about him: that through him God's mercy will extend even to her. Despite the distinctions that separate them (including race, gender, and religion), she believes Jesus is a Savior who has the power to heal all people and that she, although not a Jew, is a member of the household of God.

The second reading, from James, reminds hearers then and now that the Christian community's actions are to be shaped by God's partiality. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. While the world values the rich, the poor are God's own treasure, made honored guests and royal heirs through baptism. The community is called to a partiality based on God's values, not the world's.

The waters of baptism wash away all distinctions. Like streams breaking forth in the desert, these waters surprise us with mercy in unexpected places. These waters open our eyes, unstop our ears, and loose our tongues to see, hear, and speak God's partiality for the poor, the weak, and the outcast. Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, the Spirit fills us with faith—a faith active in showing mercy that knows no limits.

Around the table, rich and poor, haughty and humble, all who gather receive a feast fit for the family of God. All are honored and all are fed, because the Lord is the maker of them all.

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