

Sunday, September 8, 2024 – Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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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

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

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

⁸Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,
and the rod of anger will fail.

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

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

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

Psalm 125

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

²**The mountains surround Jerusalem;
so you surround your people, O LORD, from this time forth forevermore.**

³The 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.

**⁴Show your goodness, O LORD, to those who are good
and to those who are true of heart.**

⁵As 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

¹My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ²For 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, ³and 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," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, 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? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [¹¹For 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. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.]

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and 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? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Gospel: Mark 7:24-37

²⁴[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,²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He 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." ²⁸But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of

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

Prayers and introductions from
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Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God's good creation, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Awaken in our communities of faith a spirit of radical hospitality. Encourage our churches to celebrate and embrace people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. Deepen our commitment to ecumenical and interreligious partnerships. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Bring forth water to nourish plants and animals in places suffering from drought. Renew our commitments to protect rivers, lakes, and streams, and make us good stewards of water in our homes and communities. Preserve wetland habitats and the creatures that make their homes there. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Inspire leaders of cities, nations, and tribes to lead with wisdom and humility. Bring peace among peoples in conflict and strengthen global commitments to nonviolent solutions. Guide all who seek refuge from war to a safe haven. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Comfort all who live with chronic illness. Surround them in your tender embrace and sustain all who provide ongoing care and support. Bring hope and healing to people struggling with addiction and nourish the spirits of all who are in recovery. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Nurture in all people the gift of your creating Spirit. Inspire artists and musicians, woodworkers and quilters, poets and dancers. Revive those whose artistic wells have run dry and enliven all who doubt their creative talents. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give you thanks for all who have died and now find their rest in you. May their faithful witness guide us in our daily life with you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for this sixteenth 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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