

Sunday 'Spiritual Communion' in Ordinary Time

*You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place. The words in **bold** you are encouraged to say out loud as worship and prayer.*

Opening Prayer

The Church of which we are members is not defined by the walls of a building but by the Body of Christ of which we are members.

We are joining with Christians everywhere to be nourished by the one who tells us, 'I am the Bread of Life'.

Opening Sentences in the Season of Ordinary Time

God invites us to bring our needs and those of our sisters and brothers to Him in Prayer

We offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of ourselves and the church and the world because of this invitation.



Lord God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus has untied our burdens and healed our spirits. We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Prayers of Preparation and Confession

Almighty God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Sometimes we might wonder what we would say if we were to meet you in your human form Lord. Perhaps our only words would really be "Thank You Lord" for always being there.

Let us reflect on Christ's presence with us this week and when we have failed to be thankful for this.

You may wish to pray:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.



A reading from the Gospel

Read Matthew 15: 21-28 (A reflection is attached to the end of the service sheet)

Intercessions

Let us pray for the needs of the world, for our local community, and for those close to you.

End with the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father...

Holy One of Israel, covenant-keeper,
you restore what is lost,
heal what is wounded,
and gather in those who have been rejected.

Give us the faith
to speak as steadfastly as did the Canaanite woman,
that the outcast may be welcomed
and all people may be blessed. Amen.

**O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.**

Holy One, hear the prayers we have made and the concerns we have brought to you
and make us faithful stewards of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven.

We celebrate your abiding presence and that for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,
to model for us the way of love for the whole universe..

Blessing and Peace

May the Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

The Peace of the Lord be always with you



Reflection on Matthew 15: 21-28

As a Parish Priest one of the criticisms I often hear when minding my own business sitting in a pub or queuing for shopping is that religion is irrelevant. I am happily engaged in conversation as to how neither the content nor the activities of the Christian Church any longer deal with the matters of modern life. I will sometimes present the idea that we still need to be reminded of the importance of taking a rest during our busy week, or that we would do well to think about others as well as ourselves, or that we sometimes need to forgive people and need a new start in life ourselves.

Whilst the world in which the Bible was written is of course long gone it's great narrative is no less challenging. We don't really know much about Canaanite and Jewish interaction from 200 years ago it's true, but the idea that we need to think about how the unconscious prejudices that we all hold and which so often lead to an unjust society is still of immense importance. This is what we are being engaged with in the Gospel story today. In our reading we are made aware that *even Jesus* is touched by the human weakness of unconscious prejudice. Let us reflect on this.

This story is largely focused on the woman's ethnicity .. she is a Canaanite woman. The interaction which takes place suggests that there is an unconscious racism in Jesus approach to the woman. Perhaps Jesus was tired. Perhaps he had been in the company of the Jewish elite too much lately. But it is undeniable that he initially discriminates against this woman on the basis of ethnicity. It is the Jews who are the real children of God he states and it is not right to give their food to others. In his human weakness Jesus displays a subconscious prejudice against this woman. When Jesus is reminded of this by the woman He accepts the rebuff and changes his attitude. It's not what we expect of Jesus .. but read it again .. it is there in black and white!

The challenge to us is that even Jesus changed His attitudes and understanding through intercation with the world around Him. You might feel that you are too old, too tired, too uncertain about things to change your thinking .. but Jesus is an example to us all. When we are made aware of our prejudices it is our religious duty to act differently. When you catch yourself suddenly aware of discriminating or judging based on looks or clothing or background or any other level of judgement .. like Jesus you are called to acknowledge your prejudice and to act differently. This is the example Jesus gives us. It is as relevant to society today as it was 2000 years ago between religious Jew and Canaanite woman!

What is of significance is that if even Jesus had unconscious prejudice then we need not pretend that we are free of such things. We can look honestly and openly at our own hearts and minds as part of what our religion teaches us. We can look at ourselves freely and ask where we are falling short of creating a just and tolerant and loving society. And when we are challenged about our behaviour we should, like Jesus, be humble enough to acknowledge this and to act differently.

Jesus says to the woman .. you are right .. that is an unjust thing for me to say .. because of your answer go and your child will be well. And so the universal love of God is restored in simple words of healing and acceptance. How amazing that we all have the opportunity to heal in this way too.