

Muggles and Gentiles

20th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7
Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 9, 8

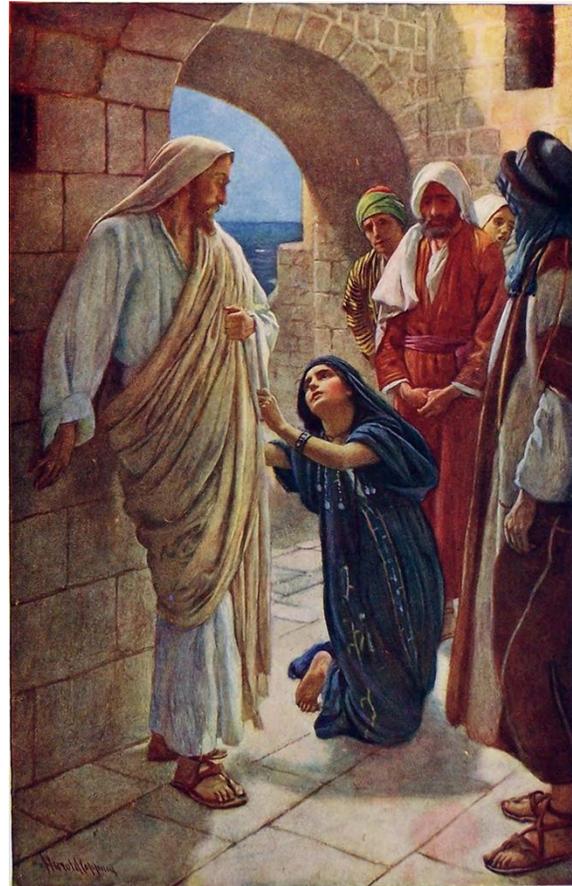
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

If you were to ask any child well versed in Harry Potter lore, about the different types of people in the Harry Potter novels, few would disappoint you. Everyone familiar with the tales of the boy wizard knows the distinctions that are made between Wizards (people with magical ability) and Muggles (non-magic folk). A few may even tell you about Squibs (non-magic people of wizard parents) and Mudbloods (wizards with one or both parents who are Muggles).

One of the great distinctions between good and evil wizards is their attitude toward those who are different from them. Harry and his friends show great compassion for non-magical people; no doubt based upon their upbringing. Indeed, Hogwarts School, under the headmastership of Professor Albus Dumbledore encourages this compassion, reflected in both the students who attend Hogwarts, as well as the faculty and staff employed. Dark wizards, however, show a great contempt for Muggles and a particular disdain for Mudbloods.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures distinctions, run wide and attitudes strong between Jews and Gentiles, those within the community/nation of God's chosen people and those on the outside. Emotions are particularly strong toward Samaritans, and in several passages, toward Canaanites. Both Jesus and the Apostles were not averse to playing upon these strong sentiments in order to challenge those who harbored them.

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, appears to relish his role as apostle to the



Gentiles because, if for no other reason, he hopes to incite jealousy in his own people, the Jews, hoping to goad even a few of them into embracing the Good News of Jesus. As the Jews had an enduring tradition of being God's Chosen People, Paul's ploy would be rather daring, turning his back on his own people to preach to the Gentiles, bringing the Gentiles to faith, and engaging in reverse psychology in order to draw in the Jews as well. In this way, they will become united to those Gentiles who believe, and therefore engage in a reconciliation in which

The Canaanite Woman

there are no distinctions.

In one incident, Jesus, Himself, appears to possess the common Jewish prejudices toward a Canaanite Woman - "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel...It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." In the end, however, what would appear to be a rather shocking comment from the Son of God, develops into a compliment in which the Gentile woman is esteemed for her faith.

Time and time again Jesus plays upon the perceived superiority of his own people, only to lift up those who would otherwise be looked down upon -- The Canaanite Woman, the Centurion, Samaritans, and sinners. Even many of his parables, particularly in Matthew speak of the latecomers receiving the same wage, or the vineyard being taken away from those originally entrusted with it and given to those who will bear fruit. In addition to asserting that even Gentiles are called to the salvation of the Kingdom, one can imagine the reaction among Jews was indignation to varying degrees at Jesus' uplifting inclusiveness of those "other" people who were not of the Jewish heritage. Like Paul, His goal may have been, in part, to evoke jealousy in those with an elite sense of superiority in order to draw at least some of them to greater compassion, inclusivity and a greater embracing of the Gospel that calls all to conversion and salvation.

Jesus continues to play upon our own sense of elitism, exclusivity or entitlement. How often in our community of faith,

particularly our parishes, do we see similar, and equally snobbish, distinctions between peoples, insinuating a superiority of one over another? Distinctions range from this group toward that group, elderly toward youth, clergy toward laity, long-time parishioners toward new-comers, wealthy toward other social classes, "traditional" toward "liberal", vice versa, all of the above, and others besides.

How might Jesus and St. Paul surprise all of us by how they respond to those we might otherwise consider "lesser" parishioners, "lesser" Christians, or even "lesser" people? How might he make us jealous of His love and compassion toward people, over and above our own sense of entitlement? How does Jesus call all of us to a state of mind in which there is no contempt, but rather greater compassion toward those otherwise considered "outsiders"? Let us recognize where the Good News of Jesus may make us jealous, and even a bit resentful, and then rejoice in the grace of God that draws all of us toward a deeper conversion of life, and toward an outlook that more and more reflects the Kingdom, proclaimed by Christ and preached by St. Paul, in which there are no distinctions of better or worse, entitled or deprived, greater or lesser between the people within it, but rather a compassionate invitation to rejoice in it for all people of faith.

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Fr. Bill Nicholas
August 12, 2011