

The prophet Isaiah lived about 600 years before Christ. He prophesies in today's First Reading that at some point foreigners will be welcome to God's mountain, Mt. Zion, what we know as Jerusalem; they will be able to make offerings and sacrifices in God's Temple, God's house. He quotes God saying "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah is prophesying that the People of God will not be limited to Israelites, and that even Gentiles will become part of God's people.

The majority of Israelites back then didn't take the prophets seriously; those that did probably thought that something like that was way, way off in the future. Jewish people referred to non-Jews as "dogs" and people from other countries were just as insulting about Jews.

Jesus grew up in this environment. That's why he initially ignored this Canaanite woman who was seeking healing for her daughter; At the beginning of her persistence he rebuffed her, saying "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." She still persisted and then he says those harsh words, that it's not right for him to minister to dogs. But she didn't miss a beat, she responded with a comeuppance that left Jesus speechless: "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." She felt hopeless and powerless, but the depth of her faith in Christ's power to heal would not deter her from seeking his help. Nothing would stop her from getting her daughter help – not even being a foreigner.

So yes, her deep, deep faith in Christ, that only he could heal her daughter, combined with her persistence, paid off, and her daughter was healed. But more importantly, this incident made the human Jesus realize that faith wasn't limited to Jewish people, and that indeed, he was sent by his Father to minister to more than just the house of Israel. He would be that agent Isaiah prophesied about, who would bring the Gentiles into the People of God. Salvation, eternal life, would not be limited to Jewish people. All who believe in Christ are welcome into God's Kingdom. God wants all to be saved through Jesus.

It is pure gift, undeserved grace, that God invites everyone to salvation who believes that Christ can accomplish this for us, that God extends eternal life to us. It is the greatest blessing we have, and not appreciated enough. Praise God and thank God every day for the blessings you enjoy now and will enjoy with eternal life. Don't take it for granted.

We just heard that God's care extends beyond the boundaries of race and nation and ethnicity. But there are still people trying to exclude everyone from God's family. We've had 2 horrible examples this past week: in Spain, radical Islamists full of hate and anger and violence showed again their misguided conviction that Christians can't be part of Allah's people. In Charlottesville, the Ku Klux Klan was one of the hate groups dumping their anger and violence. The Ku Klux Klan has always hated and excluded 3 groups of people from God's kingdom: Blacks, Jews and Catholics. There have been demonstrations against Blacks, and one day devoted just to Jews. Nothing against Catholics yet – but do not doubt that loathing for us is still there.

We can't solve these problems at a national or international level. But like Mother Theresa said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." Oppose these attitudes of hate and excluding certain people from God's salvation where they begin: in our extended families and among our friends. Resolve conflict and anger and hate when it appears. Be a peacemaker there. And oppose it where it grows: with people we go to school with, or work with, or socialize with. Oppose hatred and prejudice in discussions – especially the sinister kind that masks itself as humor, as a joke. Talk up God's love for everyone and the dignity of human beings who are made in his image. Take that mission out with you after Mass.