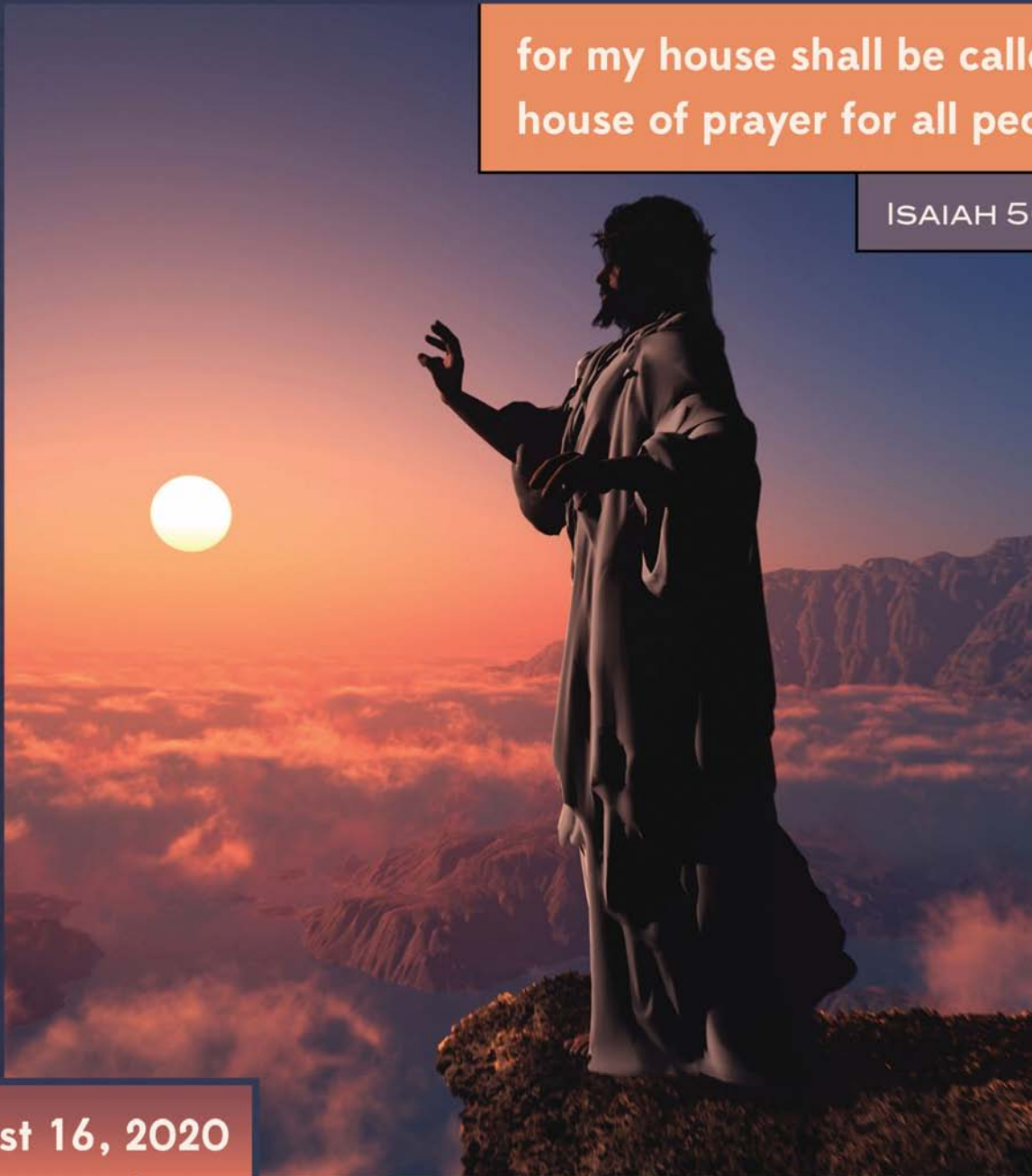


The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord . . .

*I will bring to my
holy mountain . . .*

for my house shall be called a
house of prayer for all peoples.

ISAIAH 56:6, 7



August 16, 2020

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Saint Pius X (1835-1914)

August 21

Presidential vetoes we understand. But imagine vetoing a papal election! Yet in the conclave of 1903, the Archbishop of Cracow (ironically, a predecessor in that office of Karol Wojtyla, the future John Paul II) vetoed the leading candidate on the order of the Austro-Hungarian emperor. Instead, the cardinals elected Giuseppe Sarto of Venice as Pius X, the first pope, after a succession of nobles and diplomats, to hail from humble origins. Nor did the papacy alter his endearing simplicity. Tailors eventually made his cassock cuffs detachable because he absentmindedly wiped his fountain pen on them, forgetting that his old black cassock had been replaced by papal white! Taking as his motto “To restore all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10), Pius condemned the theological innovations called “modernism,” yet dramatically altered the then-common practice whereby people rarely received Communion for fear of unworthiness, mandating early First Communion and urging everyone to frequent reception. Refusing to bless troops assembled in Saint Peter’s Square—“I bless peace, not war!”—he died brokenhearted as World War I engulfed Christian Europe despite his peacemaking efforts.

—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Why Pray?

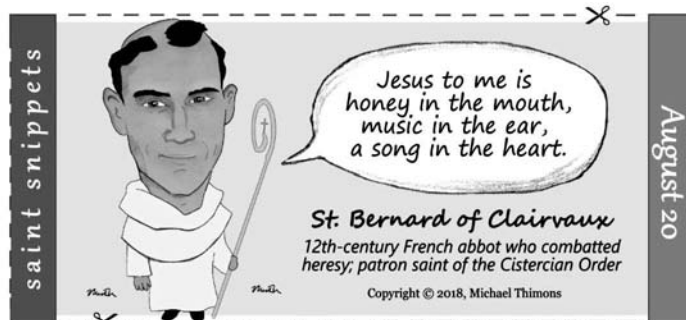
The “foreigners” as Isaiah calls them, the “Gentiles” as Paul calls them, or the “Canaanites” as Matthew calls them are called to worship the one true God in prayer. As we listen to today’s readings, perhaps we are tempted to ask: Why pray? The question is rhetorical; it is tantamount to asking why should friends talk to one another or people in love kiss one another. Prayer is a way of relating to God, a way of talking to God. The apostles had the opportunity to talk to Jesus in the flesh. We have the opportunity to talk to Jesus Christ in prayer. Our relationship with him must be enthusiastic; it cannot be faint-hearted. John Donne, a fifteenth-century poet, knew what the qualities of good prayer were. Donne asks God to treat him differently from most Christians. The poet does not want God to merely “knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend,” but also to “break, blow, burn, and make me new” (Holy Sonnets, XIV).

It takes a dynamic faith on our part to come to God in prayer. As Jesus once said, “Knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). It may take pounding the door down, but if we are as persistent as the woman in today’s Gospel, the results will follow.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Ez 24:15-24; Dt 32:18-21; Mt 19:16-22
Tuesday:	Ez 28:1-10; Dt 32:26-28, 30, 35cd-36ab; Mt 19:23-30
Wednesday:	Ez 34:1-11; Ps 23:1-6; Mt 20:1-16
Thursday:	Ez 36:23-28; Ps 51:12-15, 18-19; Mt 22:1-14
Friday:	Ez 37:1-14; Ps 107:2-9; Mt 22:34-40
Saturday:	Ez 43:1-7ab; Ps 85:9ab, 10-14; Mt 23:1-12
Sunday:	Is 22:19-23; Ps 138:1-3, 6, 8; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20



Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wednesday:	St. John Eudes
Thursday:	St. Bernard
Friday:	St. Pius X
Saturday:	Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Today's Readings

First Reading — Thus says the LORD: “Stand firm in justice; do what is right” (Isaiah 56:1, 6-7).

Psalm — O God, let all the nations praise you! (Psalm 67).

Second Reading — The gifts and the calling of God are unable to be revoked (Romans 11:13-15, 29-32).

Gospel — Recognizing the Canaanite woman’s great faith, Jesus told her, “It shall be done as you wish” (Matthew 15:21-28).

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**Twentieth Sunday
In Ordinary Time
August 16, 2020**

**Observe what is right, do what is just;
For my salvation is about to come,
My justice, about to be revealed.
—Isaiah 56:1**

Treasures From Our Tradition

In recent weeks, we have looked at the evolution of how Roman Catholics initiate children into the life of the Church. How did customs evolve in the Eastern Church? At one time, Christians in both East and West preferred to celebrate baptism in a community setting, with large numbers of adults and children initiated at Easter. The two branches of Christianity began to split on the proper time to do this.

In the East, water was blessed in abundance on the feast of the Epiphany, which marked, among other things, the baptism of the Lord. Once infant baptism was fixed on that day, local customs marking a birth began to evolve. One celebration was the giving of a name on the eighth day, another was the “purification” of the mother on the fortieth day after birth. In that blessing, re-enacting Mary and Joseph’s journey to the temple, the priest took the baby in his arms and placed the child before the altar. Just as Simeon received the child Jesus, so the priest received the new Christian while chanting Simeon’s prayer. Later, normally on Epiphany, the priest would baptize, chrismate (confirm), and give a few drops of the Precious Blood to the child in a joyous celebration of the whole community.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Our Lectionary readings today invite us to consider both the human tendency to build boundaries between people, and God’s tendency to cross and even to break these boundaries. Isaiah and Paul speak of God’s ongoing desire to bring all of humanity under divine care. The scene in Matthew’s Gospel alludes to the long-standing distrust between foreigners and the Jewish people. Though Jesus initially resists, he then celebrates the faith of the Canaanite woman and heals her daughter. Those who are given the gift of faith can be tempted to believe that God is present only to them, implicitly creating barriers against others. But the gift of faith is meant to serve God’s larger purpose, so that everyone might be united with God. By his act of healing, Jesus breaks the boundary between Jew and Gentile, and invites both to be a part of God’s people.

STANDING FAST

Matthew opens the scene in today’s Gospel by setting up a conflict. Unlike the parallel story in Mark (7:24), the woman is described as “a Canaanite.” This label serves to evoke the ancient animosity between Jews and other peoples in the region. The woman, who is never named, begs for help for her daughter. The disciples are actively dismissive of her, as a woman and a foreigner, and deem her to be unworthy of their attention. The text suggests that Jesus initially sided with the disciples. But then he recognized the strength of her faith. Many women, foreigners, or marginalized persons might

identify with this woman’s story. Sometimes faith means standing fast, in care for others or in fidelity to truth, even when it seems that no one supports you. Somehow, the woman recognized God’s power and God’s care within Jesus. And Jesus recognized that God was active within her, manifested in her commitment to her daughter. Jesus saw his Father’s larger horizon of care for everyone, Jew and Gentile, within this faith-filled woman.

A NEW TEMPLE

Isaiah articulates the vision that it is God’s deep desire that all human beings will respond to God in prayer and thanksgiving. God will summon everyone to “my holy mountain,” that is, the temple Mount. The temple was the primary symbol of God’s presence among the people. The Temple was where communal worship and sacrifice took place. Worship served to give thanks for God’s blessings on the people. Sacrifice served to help heal relationships between God and Israel, and within the community, when sin had damaged or broken them.

The early church reflected upon this vision and saw Jesus as a new temple. The person of Jesus is to be worshiped as God’s active presence within human life. Jesus is to be worshiped in prayer and thanksgiving, and Jesus is where relationships are healed and renewed. In Jesus, God invites the whole world into God’s loving care.

Today’s Readings: Is 56:1, 6–7; Ps 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8; Rom 11:13–15, 29–32; Mt 15:21–28

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