

For many of us the Gospel we have just listened to seems totally out of character for Jesus. Again and again we are told of how people from all over the place and all walks of life came to Jesus to listen to him, and to be healed of their ills and afflictions. And, it wasn't only his fellow countrymen which he healed. The people who listened to his Sermon on the Mount are said to have come from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Samaria, as well as from Israel itself. The same is told of the crowd which he gave to eat with five loaves and two fishes. We are told specifically that he cured the servant of a Roman Centurion, who came to ask Jesus to heal that servant. When Jesus healed 10 lepers who came to him as a group, he did not exclude the Samaritan, who was one of them, and praised him when he was the only one to come back to thank him.

So what's happening here, that here Jesus claims that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.?

The fact that Matthew makes a point of including this story in the Gospel must mean that he recognised a special reason for Jesus to act in this way. An obvious reason could be how he looked for faith in people who came to him to beg for healing, but that's hardly the case here, - the woman is desperate for a healing for her daughter, and keeps following Jesus and the Apostles, clamouring for attention.

The clue, therefore, could be the plea of the Apostles to Jesus for him to give her what she wants because her shouting is becoming an embarrassment to them. There's something here that has a familiar ring about it, for in asking for her to be given what she wants, they are asking for a problem to be removed, rather than a human being heard, responded to and cared for.

I can hear echoes there of the clamour to move homeless people away from Flinders St. Station, because they are an embarrassment, but without finding out why they are homeless and doing something positive about it. Or about the problem of youth lawlessness and violence, without recognising the link to unemployment, or the lack of groups and facilities that cater for their social needs.

But there is a deeper reason for the way Jesus acted in the way he did. He is asking the woman where she is in relation to reality, especially the great reality, - God. What is her life's response to the ultimate? As Jesus stated in his response to the Apostles, 'I am sent to bring back the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' Where is she in the great plan of salvation? What is she looking for beyond the things of today?

The thing is that the problems of life will go on. What that day was: "My daughter is tormented by a devil", will be something else tomorrow. Troubles from within and outside will continue to come and go, just as joys and good fortune will. What makes for happiness, and finally eternal happiness through all of this, that's what Jesus is asking about: the pearl of wisdom, the treasure hidden in a field, the deeply rooted faith which leads to the Kingdom of God dwelling in our hearts.

Just as Jesus had led his disciples to a deeper faith, when last Sunday we heard about the storm at sea, and the Apostles were struggling getting nowhere, until Jesus came to them walking on the water, so now he leads this distraught mother to deeper faith through his seeming indifference to her concern.

It's one thing to give without adding a second thought, as we do when we drop a couple of dollars in a beggar's cup, and another to draw out a profession of faith that reveals a growing in her relationship with God.

In saying to her, "that it is not fair to take the children's food to give it to the house-dogs", Jesus is inviting her to look beyond that narrow view, and her response is magnificent: "Ah yes, Sir, but even the house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table." She's the only person in the Gospel who's wit has outwitted Jesus, and Jesus rewards her with the assertion, "Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted." And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Can we keep things in perspective and broaden our interests beyond ourselves, by embracing our share in building up the Kingdom of God here on earth, - to give purpose to our life, and having gained treasure in heaven, are able to enter that Kingdom in all its glory? May it be so for each one of us!!!