

August 18, 2008  
St. Theresa's Church  
Matthew 15: 21-28

Shocking! Jesus saying to the Canaanite woman that he would not heal her daughter because she was not a Jew. And then Jesus refers to the Canaanite woman as a dog. Shocking!

When I read those lines, I said that there must be some other meaning to the words spoken than what I read. To find an answer, I turned to the Jerome Biblical Commentary for an explanation. The writer states that "the dialogue (between Jesus and the Canaanite woman) was an instance of the kind of wit that was and is admired in the Near East. It is the ability to match riddle to riddle, insult to insult..." Jesus would not have been a good Palestinian if he had not "occasionally engaged in a duel of wit."

Today in America, we are very sensitive about the issue of race and what we say about each other. But maybe not so much in Hawaii where we have been poking fun at each other for many years. Of course, the master of ethnic humor in Hawaii is Frank De Lima. Some people may not know that Frank is only half Portuguese and the other half is made up of six other blood lines. He has entertained us for over 30 years calling us names like Pake (Chinese), Book Book (Filipino), and of course Pawdagee (Portuguese). And how can we forget his colorful characters like Mary Tunta, Imelda and her shoes, and Tita Turner. Frank has cut 13 cds of which 11 have won the Na Hoku Hanohano award, Hawaii's equivalent of the Grammy. But we know that Frank's heart is not in making fun at people to hurt them but to teach them to laugh at themselves and to be enriched by many cultural differences of Hawaii's people. In 1980, he created a non-profit organization called Frank De Lima Student Enrichment Program. Every year he visits about 175 public and private K- 8 grade schools preaching to the kids the importance of reading, studying, laughing, family, and managing emotional and physical life transitions.

Several weeks ago I was having a conversation with a few parishioners, when one said that she felt that there was something "missing" at St. Theresa's. Could she be missing community where every one feels that they belong regardless of their racial makeup? Are we excluding those different from us like the Jews did to the Caananites? When we say to others that we belong to St. Theresa's

church, do we mean a place where we believe that all people are welcomed and are treated with respect and dignity?

Every Sunday after mass, as I say goodbye to those who have attended mass I hear from our visitors that they felt blessed by being part of our Sunday Assembly. Then why would a parishioner think that there is something "missing" here at St. Theresa's?

Let me suggest some possible ideas on why a person could feel that there is something "missing." Maybe, we are not present enough to each other especially during times of trial like when a parishioner or a family member is seriously ill or has died. Do we support our parish members with food or conversation when they are experiencing serious life difficulties? Or are we more apt to stay away and avoid people with serious problems?

I am sure that you have your own ideas on what we can work together on to build a more loving St. Theresa's community. I therefore encourage you to write your ideas on a single sheet of paper and place them in next Sunday's collection basket. Or pick up a parish bulletin to find the email address of the parish and send an email.

When we work together to find the answer to what is "missing" at St. Theresa, we will get to know each other better and build a community of believers and that is what Jesus wants of us.

After we get over the shock of the words exchanged between Jesus and the Canaanite woman, we learn the 'rest of the story.' We will not be saved because we belong to a certain race or group, but because we believe in Jesus like the Canaanite woman. When we believe and act according to our belief, we will as the prophet Isaiah wrote be a "house for all peoples."