

Prejudice and Growth Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A August 20, 2017
10:00 AM **Is 56:1, 6-7;** Rom 11:13-15, 29-32; **Mt 15:21-28** (Most Americans are not hateful, but may go along with racist remarks just to get along and avoid conflict.)

“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.”

This is an uncharacteristic insult on the lips of Jesus. We should be surprised, but it shows how completely he immersed himself in our humanity. Referring to gentiles as dogs is insulting. But let’s face it; **insulting people who are different is sadly a constant characteristic of human behavior.** For Jews, gentiles were the “other” and, therefore, not included in the blessings and benefits of the covenant; that’s what they felt.

Now there were signs that some of the prophets saw this distinction between Jew and gentile as melting away eventually, as we heard in the first reading from Isaiah, but that had not yet crystallized in the mind of the people and the culture of the people at the time of Christ. So when confronted with the gentile woman, **Jesus balked**, explaining to his disciples, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** But the point the evangelist is making, in this case Matthew, is that **this woman’s persistence paid off and, actually, Jesus changed his mind. Sometimes it’s a very holy thing to change our minds.** He changed his mind about her and perhaps about gentiles in general because we know that soon he is healing the servant of a Roman centurion.

What we can gain from this for our own lives is that **changing beliefs and perspectives handed on to us by our culture is part of following Jesus.** We need to become critical of our culture and what it gives to us, subjecting it to the values of the gospel and **allowing the gospel to create change within us.** That is part of being a disciple. We do not have to be hateful or violent to harbor **prejudices or racist feelings.** They come with the air. They **come with our**

culture and the language that we are born into. But confronted with the truth, as Jesus was in today's reading, **we might see the need for a change in our attitudes or our ways of thinking.**

The recent disturbance in Charlottesville demonstrates a deep and disturbing presence of racial hatred in our country. **Most Americans are not hateful, but may go along with racist remarks just to get along and avoid conflict.** Who doesn't want to avoid conflict?

Unfortunately, going along with racism or racist remarks in any form gives people the wrong idea. **It's actually a form of bad example.** It's actually scandal and may lead them to feel that everyone is like them.

Jesus needed the gentile woman to confront him in his humanity. Scripture says that Jesus gained perfection through what he suffered. That is the way we grow. **Many people in our society today need to grow and you could be the catalyst this very week perhaps.** Our parish mission prayer ends with this paragraph: "Help us to overcome our fears. Move us out of our comfort zones, and give us hearts to embrace the entire world in the way that Jesus taught us." Today's gospel gives us an example of what that is.