

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Genesis 45:1-15

^{45:1} Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there – since there are five more years of famine to come – so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty. ¹² And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.' ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Commentary

Joseph's life has been like a roller-coaster ride: he has assumed a position of great power and prestige in Egypt, and now he finds himself re-united with his brothers – the same brothers who sold him into slavery, many years before. What a reunion that must have been – his brothers had no idea that this powerful man, second only to Pharaoh, was their brother, Joseph! The

brothers come seeking food from Egypt's granaries: a severe famine has overtaken the land. Joseph's gift of prophecy enabled him to help Egypt prepare for the famine by storing up seven years' of grain. Joseph is able to offer his brothers – and his aged father, Joseph – both food and a place to live, and, more important, the reconciliation that all may have thought would never come. God's purposes are often hidden from us!

Reflection

Think of a time when someone you know acted with bitterness toward you, but – through the grace of God – reconciliation and peace resulted. How do you see God's hand at work, even in the difficult times?

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

^{11:1} I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ^{2a} God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

^{11:29} For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Commentary

In the last few readings from Romans, Paul's argument has been: God has done a great and wonderful work in Jesus Christ. Through him, all who believe will receive salvation. But some – the Israelites, among others, Paul's own people – reject the gospel offered to them. Paul's hope is that the Gentiles to whom he writes this letter will open their hearts to Christ, and his prayer is that disobedient Israel will one day, too, embrace the Word.

Reflection

How do we deal with our own unfaithfulness to the Gospel? What excuses do we make? God's Word reminds us that God forgives us, again and again and again.

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

^{15:10} Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

¹² Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" ¹³ He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not

planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴ Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." ¹⁵ But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." ¹⁶ Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." ²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Commentary

The teachings and actions of Jesus are sometimes hard to understand: we will open ourselves to greater maturity if we can acknowledge that truth. It is difficult in this reading to see the Canaanite woman referred to as a "dog" – This was a term sometimes used by Jews to refer to Gentiles – those who did not believe in the God of Israel. Was Jesus prejudiced against the Gentiles, as seems to be the case here? We cannot know – but we DO know that Jesus took note of the woman's faith that he could heal her daughter, and responded to it in the way that the Canaanite woman requested. The outcast found a welcome at the table of the Lord: all will find a place one day at the banquet of the Lord.

Reflection

Look into your own soul: what are your prejudices? What keeps you from considering all people as equals? What does this story tell us about God's perspective on our human prejudices and judgmentalism?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 133

^{133:1} How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
² **It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.**
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,

which falls on the mountains of Zion.
**For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**