

No-one trusts their child to the water unless....!

[Isaiah 35^{4-7a}; Psalm 146;] James 2¹⁻¹⁷; Mark 7^{24-end}

He has done everything well. [Mark 7²⁴]

The quote of the week has to be:

No-one trusts their child to a boat unless they are convinced that the water is safer than the land!

The image of the weeks has to be the picture of three-year old Aylan Kurdi washed up on the beach - one of three of his family who drowned in the Aegean when their inflatable boat overturned as they were trying to escape Syria.

What do you make of the conflict in the readings today? Do they have anything to say about the scenes that have touched us all and helped the politicians to find some concessions?

- ✦ James has really gone to town on the way in which people are received into Church. To **make distinctions among yourselves** simply means that you have **become judges with evil thoughts**. He goes on, **if you show partiality you commit sin**.

So would a Syrian refugee be as welcome in St Mary's as someone who presented themselves well and appeared to be solvent - who could give rather than receive?

Mercy triumphs over judgement is a powerful statement - together we have to ensure that this is the experience of welcome here: it is never convincing to say that God offers grace if we don't!

- ✦ Then a Gentile woman comes to Jesus and, owing to her Gentile origin, Jesus dismisses her as a dog! But this dog bit back! (This story is also recorded in Matthew 15²¹⁻²⁸ where the details are the same, but Matthew remembers that the woman's faith is commended).

Personally, I am quite happy with Jesus engaging in a robust way with a feisty woman! We need to allow Jesus to be human and to have a sense of humour and fun! Imagine this (follow the text and see if this is sustainable):

- ✦ Jesus is on holiday - he **went away** and he **did not want anyone to know that he was there**.

- ✦ The woman finds her way in - a foreigner to Jesus: a Gentile! Her tenacity and forcefulness must have been obvious and Jesus decides to play along.
- ✦ Gentiles were regarded as 'dogs' by the Jews - that much is clear. But when Jesus speaks to the woman the comparison in the Greek is between feeding *children* and feeding *puppies*!
- ✦ Her response shows understanding - **even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs!**
- ✦ Even through the tension of a woman with a sick child, you can almost hear the laughter between the two of them.

God forbid that we ever take faith so seriously that we miss the point of it all!

So the point? Faith means you act!

The woman acted on her faith - and her daughter was healed.

We act on our faith - and the Church lives out the Gospel in practical love, whoever they are and whatever their situation.

We have the privilege of standing with Diana today as she is baptised: a great moment for her and a great declaration faith made in and with the Church community.

- ✦ Just as surely as the Aegean became the coffin for Aylan the water of baptism is a symbol of death. We don't have the luxury of immersing Diana, but she is **buried with Christ in baptism**. Her life ends and then begins again - resurrected with Jesus: a new start, forgiven, free and loved.
- ✦ Just as surely as no-one trust the water unless there is better option, so Christians trust themselves to the waters of baptism because they have come to realise that they cannot have a DIY faith and that there is no other plausible option than to accept God's love in Jesus Christ.

As surely as those who leave everything in search of a better, safer life, we are refugees in search of a home - and God's welcome is open and free!