Why do the differences between people always seem to be more of a focus than their similarities? The events of this past week, last weekend and the last several months have brought the question of all the things that seem to make us collectively different to the headlines and in negative and concerning ways. I think that our growing concern for our own self-interests coupled with the confrontational times in which we live, are at the root of most of these problems in our world and country right now. We don’t know how to relate or talk to one another anymore with any sort of civil discourse it seems. We must find a way to transcend these self-centered and antagonistic times in order to find, experience and rejoice in the dignity and sameness that we as humans possess. How? What is the common identity that we are all called to share? The answer is we are called to be the People of God through our common creation by the grace of God! We were not created to be limited to this world! We were created as eternal beings and when all is said and done, our eternal life will depend on how well we identified ourselves as People of God and nothing else except the Mercy of God.

This week’s readings are timely in that they show us that the notion of racial and religious differences in particular, are something that even Jesus confronted in His time and in His ministry. More importantly though, Jesus shows us through this episode in the Gospel that our prayerful faith in Him is what is most important and is what identifies us as People of God.

The notion of the People of God is an ancient one dating back to the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses which expresses the people chosen by God to be His inheritance. Yet, our understanding of the People of God has only been more fully understood in the last 50 years. During the Second Vatican Council, the Church began the task of explaining itself to itself and the rest of the world in order to better articulate its
purpose, make up and role in the modern world in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church know as *Lumen Gentium* (LG). Who are we as Catholics and how do we relate to the entire world as the Church established by Christ for the Salvation of ALL mankind? The second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* in particular set out to answer this question and is called “The People of God”. The model of the Church as the People of God is meant to convey the notion that ALL MANKIND is called to be the People of God. But the People of God is as much a goal as a reality. This is why we considered ourselves a Pilgrim Church; we are constantly striving to be a People of God. How well we live our lives in the model of Christ and put our whole faith and trust in Him and invite others to do so as well, will determine whether we as Catholics have successfully answered the call to be a part of the People of God. But those who are not Catholics, or even Christians for that matter, are still called to be part of the People of God. *Lumen Gentium* puts it this way, “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.” (LG16) Therefore, it is through God as his creation that we find our common identity as the People of God.

This is what we see in our Gospel today. The Canaanite woman was not part of “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” that Jesus was sent to gather. She was different. She was a Canaanite, a Gentile and as such was not the audience Jesus targeted; she was on the fringes, an outsider. On the surface, this seems like an uncharacteristic form of discrimination perpetrated by Jesus and His disciples. In fact, Jesus was merely staying true to his mission of bringing His people back to the covenant that they made with God in order to be a light to all nations, drawing all Gentiles to God in the process. Instead, what we see here is a woman who is concerned for her daughter so much, and whose faith in Jesus’ ability to heal, so great, that her persistence in her pursuit of Christ is a sign of genuine faith. In this way, she fulfills what we hear in the first reading from Isaiah, “The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD and becoming his servants...them I will bring to my holy mountain.” She transcended her heritage, her religion, her situation,
her station in life for the belief in Christ and thereby exemplifies what we are called to be as members of the People of God through ardent faith in action for the good of another, in this case, her daughter.

Today Jesus through the Canaanite woman, is showing us and giving us an example of the prayerful, unselfish and active faith that WE NEED to follow Jesus and confirm ourselves as members of the People of God. It is this faith in Christ and love of neighbor, that allows us to transcend our own self-interests in order to rise above the barriers, real or perceived, that divide us in order to unite us as a common People of God instead of mere human beings. In order to dispel the hatred and unrest of our times, we must challenge ourselves to look beyond race, ethnicity, religion, etc., and follow Christ in his Church and see the hand of God who made each and every one of us. In other words, it is up to us as the Church, the People of God, to look to Christ and beyond our human differences and help others do so as well, in order to see humanities common identity as the People of God.