

Homily for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, August 16, 2020

Once again we are in the midst of Jesus ministry in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. Today, Jesus and his disciples are outside of Galilee in the Pagan territory of Tyre and Sidon. Why is Jesus there? Remember, His cousin John, the Baptist had been put to death by Herod and Jesus wanted some time alone to mourn this loss. But instead, Jesus found crowds waiting for Him where He had fed the 5000. Today, Jesus is still looking for some privacy.

When He arrives there at Tyre and Sidon, He is met by a Canaanite woman. She runs up to meet him screaming and shouting at Him. Why is she there? She is in desperate need because her daughter is possessed by a demon. She begs Jesus for help. Somehow, this woman has learned who Jesus is and so she cries out to Him: *"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David. My daughter is tormented by a devil."* The woman's prayer expresses both helplessness and faith. (*Think of it: all of us are sometimes like this woman, feeling helpless and without God. Remember there is little we can do by ourselves.*) Remember also Jesus said at the Last Supper to His disciples : *"Without me you can do nothing."* The woman's faith is there, but Jesus simply ignores her, as if she doesn't even exist. (*Do we do the same thing at times when someone annoys us? Or when we are tired and exhausted?*) Jesus's disciples are also of no help. As the woman continues to cry for help, the disciples ask Jesus simply: *"to get rid of her."* The disciples only see this woman as an annoyance. However, Jesus gives a reason why He is not listening to her as He says: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."*

When I read this gospel I came to be deeply impressed with this Canaanite woman. She is feisty! She does not get discouraged but comes and kneels before Jesus , an act of worship, and prays simply: *"Lord help Me!"* Jesus answers is shocking: *"It is not right to take the children's food*

and throw it to the dogs!" But perhaps Jesus words were said in jest and in a testing and joking way? No matter! The woman is totally unfazed by this and throws it back to Jesus: *"Yes Lord, but even the dogs can eat the crumbs that fall from the Masters table."* Jesus is won over: *"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done to you as you wish!"*

There are a number of lessons from this Gospel reading today. **First**, the need for total trust and confidence that Jesus really cares for us. **Second**, there is a need for us to be persistent in prayer. But remember we must always be aware of the fact that we are not always going to get what we pray for, are we! Sometimes praying just helps us to see more clearly what God wants for us and what is really best for us. **Third**, today's gospel is an affirmation that God's love and mercy are extended to all who call to Him in faith and trust -- no matter who we are and where we are. This was already affirmed for us in today's First Reading from the **Prophet Isaiah**: *"I, Yahweh, will bring foreigners who are believers to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my House of prayer , for my house shall be called a House of prayer for all nations."* **Fourth**, as baptized members of the Christian community we have been given special privileges of knowledge and access to God's love. But we also have serious responsibilities arising from this. One of the responsibilities we have -- **is to make clear to others by the way we live, speak, and act that God's love and God's mercy and God's healing is for others as well.**

Remember, that in God's eyes there are no **"dogs."** And the food of the Master's table, the Lord's Word and His love are not just the crumbs, but are for all without exception.