

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A – 2020)
St. Patrick - Milford

Today's Gospel contains one of the most memorable verbal duels recorded in the four Gospels, and one of the most important. We need to draw some golden nuggets out of this wonderful passage.

First of all, it is important to note that Jesus is speaking here to a woman, something rabbis back in those days did not do in public. Not only that, but she was a foreigner, a Canaanite woman from the area that these days we call Lebanon. The Jews and the Canaanites did not get along well at all.

In this account there are three movements. The first involves Canaanite woman's journey of faith. Leaving her own religion behind she turns to a Jewish rabbi, Jesus, and places her faith in Him. She looks to Him for a miraculous cure for her daughter.

For her trouble, she received silence from Jesus. She was rebuffed, humiliated, and given a cold shoulder from Him. Jesus' disciples, annoyed by the fact that she was bothering Him with her loud crying, seek to get rid of her. They want Jesus to send her away. So, Jesus says to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Then comes the second movement. The woman presses in on Jesus, and falling on her knees in front of Him she cries out, "Lord, help me." For her second effort Jesus tells her, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

How utterly humiliating. In effect Jesus was calling her a dog! Her humility was turned into what appeared to be a terrible humiliation. People in the Middle East are very sensitive about such things. We are very aware of that in our dealings with them in our time.

Then comes the final movement. In abject humility with her face in the dirt, stripped of her dignity, having abandoned her own religious background, she has nothing left, not even her pride. "Please, Lord," she softly insists, "even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." What the Canaanite woman is saying is that she doesn't deserve anything. "But," she asks, "how about giving me scraps that accidentally fall from your abundance?" With that, the heart of Jesus is vanquished.

The scene would be repeated later on at the end of His life. His own humiliation and abandonment would, connected as it was with the Last Supper, play out in a way strikingly similar to this account.

The key that unlocks the mystery contained in this verbal duel is to recognize that Jesus saw in this Canaanite woman a reality that she didn't even see herself. He saw in her a faith that could withstand any assault; a love that was divine; a hope that could not be shaken. He tested her bravery and she found something within herself that she didn't know even existed. Joined into the humiliation that Christ would later suffer, she transcended ordinary humanity and came into a level of life that was God's. Her three-step journey in faith mirrored Christ's.

The critical point of it all is that Jesus sees the same thing in you and in me. For He has an unrealized dream about who we really are and what we're really made of. In Christ's life, passion, and death, we find the stuff of our real humanity, particularly so when we share in His suffering, passion, and death.

Had Jesus granted her request right away, this woman would never have ascended to the heights of glory that she did. We must see that in the divine scheme of things, the more we lose the more we win. The more we give away, the more we gain. The more we go down, the higher we ascend. In that, we pass from what is human into what is divine. It's the path of Jesus.

In the divine scheme of things, the more we lose the more we win. The more we give, the more we receive. The more we go down, the higher we ascend. Ask anyone who has ever successfully completed a recovery program, they will tell you that you find power over whatever demons beset you when you surrender to your Higher Power.

God came among us with healing power and He is looking for our faith. The Canaanite woman came to God in faith and in search of healing and found it. Your task and mine as well is to live a life-story just like hers.

Can you? Can I? Yes, we can, because Jesus lived it first and then gave us the power and the capacity to live lives like that. The question is not: Can we? The real question is: Will we?