

**August 16, 2020 Humbly Praying For Mercy Homily:** One of the significant dates in the history of the Twentieth Century is June 6, 1944. We are accustomed to refer to this date as D-Day. In retrospect, it proved to be a decisive day in the outcome of the Second World War. Allied forces, including many American soldiers, landed on the beaches of Normandy in Northern France and engaged the enemy in battle. On the very same day, a typically large crowd could be seen in New York City's Grand Central Station. As usual, it was a hub of activity. According to a credible eyewitness, an unexpected public service announcement echoed throughout the cavernous terminal in the early morning. The speaker said: "Could we have five minutes of silence? D-Day has begun. Our American forces have landed in France." What then occurred was truly remarkable: virtually everyone who heard the somber message fell to their knees, praying fervently for the safety of their brothers at war. Americans at home were fearful, apprehensive and desperate. Some could be heard crying out, "Lord, have mercy".

In today's gospel (Mt. 15: 21-28), we were introduced to a Canaanite woman. Who was she? Clearly she was a foreigner, a pagan and a woman from outside the Jewish community. Since she was a non-Jew she was likely held in contempt by the professional class, especially the Pharisees, for whom she was a figure of contempt, a dog.

One can fully understand her desperation. She thinks only of her daughter, who is possessed by a demon. Seemingly, as a last resort, she turns to Jesus. She calls upon him as "Lord" and "Son of David". According to biblical scholars, she raised her voice. She literally screamed for mercy and falls at the Savior's feet. Jesus responds to her with utter silence. The nearly hysterical woman has to endure the silence. But she remains undaunted. She refuses to be discouraged. She perseveres in knocking at the door of Jesus' heart.

When Jesus says to her, "O woman of great faith" (Mt. 15:28), we have no need of any further proof of the greatness of her soul. Indeed, George Martin, a contemporary scripture scholar, points out that the Canaanite woman is the only person in Matthew's gospel whose faith Jesus characterizes as great. Recall that Jesus was saddened by the lack of faith of his neighbors and the little faith of his own disciples.

What lessons can we derive from today's gospel?

First, there is a need for patience and perseverance. The late bishop Fulton Sheen once wrote, "When people complain their prayers are not heard by God, what often has happened is that they do not want to wait for his answer";

Second, when we become aware of our own fears, when we become aware that we need help and mercy, then, and only then, will Jesus reveal himself to us;

Third, recall that Jesus chose not to perform miracles in the absence of faith. Earlier in Matthew's gospel, the evangelist informs his readers that Jesus "did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief". (Mt. 13:58) Jesus demands our loyalty; and

Fourth, the anonymity of the woman is worthy of note. So often the key figures mentioned in the gospels are unnamed. Why? Perhaps the evangelists hope to encourage us to see in ourselves those unforgettable biblical characters. So one can say, "I am the Canaanite woman" and appeal for God's help in Christ. "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David." (Mt. 15:22)

Amen!