



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

August 16, 2020

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Put yourself in the shoes of this woman whose daughter is suffering illness. You've been to all the doctors, they haven't given you a clear diagnosis, and they haven't been able to cure her. All the people tell you that she's probably possessed by the devil. You're at the end of your ropes. You've even tried all the home remedies, self-proclaimed village faith healers, purchased a prayer cloth (lol). But nothing has worked. Now you hear about this Jesus, who's coming through town; he's not from Canaan, he's a Jew. However, word has travelled of the miracles he's done. So you figure, let's go check him out, what can it hurt you've tried everything else.

You see him walking down the road with his entourage, there are lots of people around him, and surrounding him are a bunch of guys who look like his bodyguards. He is a superstar, and you have no chance of getting close to him, you're a gentile and a woman. So, you cry out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David." You're calling attention to yourself by now, so the bodyguards, ok, let's call them disciples, tell Jesus, "send her away." But this is your last chance to help your daughter and you hope he heard you shouting your plea and it will bring a response. However, this seemingly popular Jesus, just keeps walking as if he didn't hear you. So you keep trying. What do you have to lose? Somehow, you are able to push your way through the crowd and get past the disciples. Now, you fall in humility in front of him and ask again, "Lord, help me."

Now you're making a scene before Jesus, blocking his way, so finally, He has to respond. But does he turn to you in compassion and ask you what's wrong? No. He tells you that your problems are not any business of his. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In other words, I am here to help Jews, not Gentiles, like you. In fact, the gospel writer has made that point even more clearly in the description of the woman as a Canaanite. In this gospel reading, Matthew takes time to make the point that this woman is completely outside of God's care, she's not just any old gentile—she's belongs to the most worthless, most hated group of people of all.

So the superstar tells you, "look woman, I've got nothing to do with you." But like any loving parent, she won't take no for an answer. "Lord, help me," you continue to plead. Now Jesus responds to you directly, but what he says is hardly reassuring. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Instead, she turns it back on him. "We may be dogs, Jesus, but remember, loving masters, give their dogs table scraps to eat." She challenges his humanity and his basic love for human-kind.

The gospel message is not a very charitable story is it? Jesus isn't behaving like we know he's supposed to behave, and the woman isn't exactly an acceptable citizen. Jesus is a Jew and his humanity is present in this encounter with the woman. So, she shakes her head and put her hands on her hips and let him have it. Now, she's finally convinced him to help her. Jesus praises her for her persistent faith, and the gospel tells us that her daughter is healed instantly.

I think if we look closely the Canaanite woman speaks for all of us as she stops Jesus in his tracks and demands that Jesus help her. If we truly follow the message of Christ, it is the main purpose why God sent him into the world, so that the Love of God and the Kingdom of Heaven would be extended to all people. The woman in her boldness also challenges us. She demands of us to commit to where we stand in our relationship with a God who is all loving, constantly removing the barriers that divide human beings one from another, this God, who challenges us to unceasingly seek His grace and mercy.

The faith the Canaanite woman shows, is not the simple faith that is so often what we exhibit, in our good works, piety and devotion. Hers is a questioning, challenging faith, a persistent faith, demanding an answer and response to her prayers. We too should expect this show of mercy and respect not only from our Christian brothers and sisters of faith. But also from God himself who the Canaanite woman believes that this Jesus to whom she kneels before has the power to grant. "Lord, help me" is our cry.