

Twentieth Sunday A

Matthew 15:21-28

There are times in the lives of all of us when things seem to go exceptionally well. Plans work out, dreams take substance and shape, and projects fall into place.

On such occasions we naturally find ourselves rejoicing. It is clear to us that life is filled with personal satisfaction and accomplishments which enable us to feel worthwhile and increase our faith in God.

By the same token, there are times in the lives of all of us when everything seems to go wrong. We started off the year 2020 with so much excitement and confidence in a strong economy, and hope of a good life only to encounter, a couple of months later, the coronavirus and its deadly effects.

In these difficult and challenging days, when businesses are shut down, “parks and beaches closed”, and so many unknowns ahead, we struggle to move along life’s way when crossed by the dark shadow of the pandemic, and wonder where is God in all of this.

“Look to the brighter side of life” is one of the ways for us to get through this terrible darkness. “Keep the faith” is another encouragement. All are great sayings, but are much harder to do.

I will confess that I find it very hard to do. Many of us are probably thinking, well that is not very helpful. If a priest, a man who is meant to exemplify Christian conviction, has trouble of looking at the brighter side of life and keeping the faith in the good God, how is he going to strengthen believers’ confidence about God?

Well, you are right to be concerned, however I actually think the key to an ability to offer a reflection, a message on the faith is exactly in the fact that I struggle with it.

Like Peter who, in last Sunday’s Gospel story, asked Jesus to allow him to walk across the water, but became frightened and began to sink, I too fell short. At times, I struggle to hold on to my belief in the goodness of God and the power of hope in the midst of increased darkness and loss.

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We all are human beings. We all are fallible. We all make mistakes. We all struggle. The question is not whether or not we struggle — the question is whether or not we keep striving to trust God more and persevere in the faith.

In today's Gospel, we heard of a very persistent and persevering woman, a Canaanite, a non-Jew who came before Jesus to ask for the healing of her daughter who was tormented by a devil.

“Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us,” the disciples complained to Jesus after hearing the woman implore Him to help her. Yet, they aren't the only ones who seem to be indifferent to the woman's pleas. Someone else does too - and that person is Jesus. Yes, the Christ.

He seemed reluctant and even said that it was not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house dogs. That doesn't seem to be the Jesus that we are familiar with, the Jesus who is kind and compassionate, and loving and merciful.

At this point that Canaanite woman could have felt insulted and despised and she could have walked away from Jesus. But instead, she chose to believe in Jesus, to keep her faith in God. For that, Jesus commended her for her faith and granted her wish and from that moment her daughter was well again.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Most of us want to have the faith of that Canaanite woman. In fact - maybe every single one of us. We probably wouldn't be here otherwise. And we all know this. It is easy to say to ourselves and others: “Keep the faith.” Yet, it is no simple thing to do it.

Indeed, it is no small matter. But we must keep striving to live it. Without it, without trust in God's goodness, what is there for us to hold onto?

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Like the Canaanite women who got what she asked for by her persistence, we will get our prayers answered, we will get through whatever life may throw at us, if we persevere in the faith.

This is what Jesus wants us to realize from this story. He is showing us that perseverance in the faith has power to save, just as the woman's faith saved her daughter.

**“O woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.”**

Let us imitate her. Let us trust in God to be present, loving and good to us in every circumstance of life.

Let us persevere in prayer and hope for better days. “... **Great is your faith!**” It is our faith that saves us. Amen.