

Dcn. Jerry's Homily for 8-20-23, 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This is a very difficult Gospel for me. Why does Jesus treat this Canaanite woman this way? I tried to go back and see if there was something she said or did that was wrong. No. After all, Elijah with the Tishbite woman, Elisha with Naaman, the Syrian general and many other miracles in the Old Testament show that God comes for everyone. Jesus has already healed the Gennesaret demoniac, the Gennesaret sick and the Centurion's servant before this event. He has already demonstrated that he did not come for just one ethnic group.

This short Gospel teaches at least three lessons. How to pray, how Jesus stretches us and how we should react to the needs of others.

The Canaanite woman prays in a way that I often forget. Perhaps that is why her prayers are answered. She starts her prayer, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!" Have pity. I do not deserve mercy. I do not deserve a miracle. I am not bargaining with you. I am not placing a condition on your gift. I do not think I am in charge.

"Lord, Son of David" you are the Messiah. How often do we start with praise? Give glory to God. Recognize that whatever God gives he gives freely. He acts in his own way and in his own time. We cannot bind him.

She must have been pleading and pleading because the Disciples became annoyed. Many of us have a child or loved one who is tormented by a demon or is sick. Do we continue to pray for them or get mad or frustrated with God because he does not act in our time or in our way? Some of our prayers confuse who is in charge. It is like God; I am in charge not you. God if you do not do things my way then I am abandoning you.

She is persistent in praise and prayer.

The Disciples' reaction is curious, to say the least. She is bothering us. Tell her to go away. Had they tried to shoo her away and were unsuccessful? All we know is this foreign woman persisted in prayer.

Then Jesus seems to respond to the Disciples' request. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." What tone of voice did Jesus use when he made that statement? The lost sheep of Israel could have more than one meaning. Certainly, it refers to those of Jewish origin who were not faithful. But the lost sheep of Israel also has a spiritual meaning. Spiritually we are all the lost sheep of Israel. God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. During his public ministry Jesus reveals not only that he is the Son of God but that he came for all of us.

I wonder what tone of voice Jesus was using with the woman. Was he curt, was he angry or impatient? What did the woman hear in his tone of voice? Because she again requested his help. He does not respond with a question but with a declarative

statement, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." A zinger! That is the end of the discussion normally. When we do not get the response we want from God do we just walk away. Do we hear the silence from God as a sharp rebuke? After all, God should understand that what I want is reasonable and if God does not understand, then he is unreasonable.

But that is not the response of the Canaanite woman. Even the dogs eat the scraps from the master's table. She is humble and acknowledges that Jesus is the master. She accepts whatever the master offers and whenever He offers it I will accept.

Prayer is a conversation with God. And in this conversation, this prayer, this Canaanite woman praises God and humbly states she is like a dog under the table. She will accept whatever the master chooses to give her.

In some ways Jesus may be using this woman like a professor uses a good student to teach others a lesson. To do this well, the student must be willing. Unfortunately, the Disciples seem to be slow on the uptake. We are much like the Disciples, if this woman is troublesome or irritating get rid of her.

Pray with patience and humility and accept what God gives you. Learn from the Disciples' mistakes. In many ways they are followers, students throughout Christ's public ministry. You and I have an advantage over the Disciples at this point. We experience the Last Supper and the Crucifixion through the Eucharist, the Resurrection and the Pentecost through Confirmation and Reconciliation. When we see someone with an urgent need, instead of dismissing them we should pray with them for their needs. When we have urgent needs, praise God. Acknowledge he is in charge. Accept his mercy and accept his gifts, if any, in his time.

Remember, where two or three are gathered together God is there. God bless you!

~Dcn. Jerry