

THE 20TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR 'A'

August 17, 2008

(Isaiah 56:1, 6-73; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28)

“Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish”

One Monday morning I received a phone call from a woman who was angry with God. She said, ***“Hello! Is that the Reverend Father?”*** When I answered in affirmation, she continued: ***“Father, my life is shattered. I am not happy with God if he really exists. You Pastors preach that God is merciful and love and that he answers our prayers. That is trash. I have prayed for months for a little favor from God without any answer. To say that God ignored me will be a mark of respect, he totally abandoned me.”*** I interrupted her long sermon by asking her how much she paid God for her life and for the air she breaths. At this point she was silent. Five minutes later, she apologized and asked for God’s mercy and forgiveness.

My beloved people of God, sometimes when we find our self in certain troubles, we feel abandoned by God like this woman. But that is not true. God does not abandon us. The Canaanite woman in our Gospel story faced this same challenge when she puts Jesus on the spot by pleading for his help. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her, and this made his disciples feel embarrassed. Jesus does this to test the woman, to awaken faith in her. Sometimes we find our self in a similar situation. We face difficulties and challenges of life and call upon God in prayer several times without getting what we expected. We even feel ignored or abandoned by God. In such a hopeless situation, how do we react? Do you give up or do you persevere in prayer? The Canaanite woman showed us the way.

Given her position as a foreigner and as a woman, it took phenomenal courage on her part to decide to take on the all-Jewish and all-male company of Jesus and his disciples. Even when she addresses Jesus by his proper Messianic titles and pleads: ***“Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David”*** (Matthew 15: 22), Jesus still ignored her: ***“He did not answer her at all”*** (verse 23a). Most people at this point would give up and accept defeat. But rather than giving up, this Canaanite woman intensifies her efforts and embarks on a one-woman demonstration to the point that the disciples had to ask Jesus to do something about it: ***“Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us”*** (Matthew 15: 23). At the end her courage and her perseverance finally paid off.

Furthermore, even when Jesus echoes the Jewish custom in his time, of referring to Gentiles as 'dogs' by saying that ***“it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs”***, the woman immediately responds with wit and faith – ***“even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table”***. Jesus at last gave in: ***“O Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish”*** (verse 28) and the woman got what she wanted. Jesus praises a Gentile woman for her faith and for her love.

My dear people of God, be assured that no one whoever seeks Jesus with faith – whether Jew or Gentile – is refused his help. Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith? As we encounter challenges and difficulties of this world, let us always remain faithful and courageous like this Canaanite woman. Don't give up the fight. The least among us can be a vehicle that God can use to bring justice and healing to all of God's disadvantaged sons and daughters all over the world.

GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME!