

Homily – 20th Sunday – Ord A

Ok let me start with this question. Be honest....How many of you think that in this Gospel story when this poor woman came begging Jesus to heal her demon- possessed daughter...how many of you think Jesus acted like a real jerk – at least at first ?...That's OK, so do I...I mean, here was this desperate mother pleading with Jesus to free her child from the grip of the devil,...and what does Jesus do? ...At first, He totally ignores her – nothingAnd then when His disciples urge Him to send her away, He tells her He came only to save the lost sheep of Israel – the Jews...Now she was a non-Jew, a Gentile, so that's like saying, "You're not one of us, lady. Get lost." ...And when she falls to her knees, crying out, "Lord, help me,"...Jesus basically calls her a dog as He says, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."...meaning that God's blessings, God's graces are solely for the Jews and not to be given to dogs (that's what the Jews called Gentiles)...Finally, after she reminds Jesus that even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table,...Jesus is amazed at the woman's faith in Him...After being ignored, rejected and insulted,...she believes even a crumb of blessing from Jesus will be enough to cure her daughter,...and so He grants her request...Her daughter is healed.

But why was Jesus so harsh with the poor Canaanite woman?...Why did she have to beg THREE times before Jesus showed her the compassion He always showed to anyone who came to Him for healing? ...Well no one knows for sure why Jesus acted so out of character... Bible scholars have offered several theories....One of them is that Jesus was role-playing to help His disciples see how cruelly and heartlessly the Jews were treating the Gentiles...But, I'm not going to get into these different theories this morning...That's a subject for another homily...

Instead, I want to focus on one of the messages God is sending to us through this Gospel....It's a message I believe will – at some time - apply to most, if not all, of our lives....It certainly has to mine...Very simply, it has to do with how we respond when God is silent...when God "puts us on hold."...What do we do when we're dealing with something really heavy, something really hard, and we go to God – to Jesus – asking for help,... asking for things to get better,... asking for healing,...and we're praying as hard as we ever prayed,...we even come to church to pray to Jesus in the Tabernacle,...and we've got other folks praying for us,...and in spite of all this,...all we get from God is dead silence. ...no answer. ... How do we handle this?...It's hard isn't it?...We want all our prayers to be answered right away. ...We wish that everything we ask for, that God would give us right there on the spot.

When we pray, we don't want God to say "no" or "not yet."Yet truth is, sometimes God says "yes", sometimes "no", and sometimes He says "Wait, not yet."But when God is silent, how do we know if the answer is "no" or "not yet"?...When no answer comes,...do we give up on praying? ...Do we give up asking for God's help for that thorny situation or for that person we care so much about or for that big decision we have to make?...Do we give up and walk away thinking it's been a big waste of time... maybe begin to lose hope...maybe get angry at God...maybe even begin to doubt there's a God to get angry at?...If we've ever reacted in any of these ways, we're pretty normal...I recently counseled two mothers, each of them very troubled and distraught about a daughter going thru an extremely difficult time...One's daughter is in Rochester General Hospital with inoperable brain cancer, in terrific pain. The other has a

daughter whose health and marriage are in terrible shape...Both of these desperate, worried women told me they had reached a point where they could no longer pray...They had given up because God did not seem to want to answer them...Their feelings ranged from sadness to despair to guilt...I'll bet more than a few of us here can identify with what they're going through.

The woman in today's Gospel shows us a different way to respond when God puts us on hold, ...This woman had a daughter severely tormented by a demon. She needed real help, and even though she was a Gentile, she must've heard about Jesus and all the good He had been doing...So she went to Him and pleaded for her child,...Now when Jesus said and did nothing, she could've given up...Instead she kept crying out to Him, so much so that she was annoying His disciples who tried to get Jesus to send her away. ...Then when Jesus told her He couldn't help her because she wasn't a Jew,...she didn't let that discourage her...She threw herself at His feet, begging for help ...And even after being compared to a dog, she didn't go away in shame...She humbly agreed that she wasn't worthy of Jesus' blessing, ...but she welcomed any tiny crumb of blessing He would throw her way...She had been ignored, ...rejected ...insulted, ...yet she didn't get upset,...she didn't get angry. ..She wasn't a Jew, but she knew there was something special about J...She believed He was the only one who could help her child....So she wasn't about to stop begging and pleading until her pleas were answered. ...My friends, when our prayers seem to fall on deaf ears, we would do well to imitate this woman of great faith.

To do that we need to realize that this Gospel isn't just a nice story that happened a long time ago. ...The Jesus we read about in the Gospels touching people's lives, is the same Jesus who wants to touch your life and mine...He sees the hurt,...the failures, ..the bad decisions...He sees our lack of trust in Him...He sees all of this and a lot which we wish He didn't see,...and yet His love for us and His willingness to help us is strong as ever, and should never be doubted....Here, let me illustrate.... *Take out \$100 bill*...Who would like this \$100 bill?...Ok ...*Crumple it into a ball*...Now that I've crumpled it all up, who still wants it?...Ok, but what if I do this?...*Put bill on floor and grind it into floor with shoe and pick it up*...Now, who still wants it?...Ok, what's the lesson here?...No matter what I did to this bill, you still wanted it because it didn't decrease in value. It was still worth \$100...Well, it's the same with each of us...Many times in our lives, we are crumpled,... we are trampled into the dirt by circumstances we can't control, or by decisions we make...and Jesus doesn't seem to be responding to our cries for help. ...Maybe we're thinking that He's not answering because we don't deserve it...We're not worthy of His love...My friends, no matter what life does to us,...or what we bring on ourselves, ...we will never lose our value, our worth in the eyes of God....in the eyes of Jesus Christ. ...Jesus died on the cross to save us from our foolishness, our stupidity,...our sins...because we are worth saving...We should never forget that.

I doubt that the Caananite woman felt very worthy, but she knew that if Jesus didn't answer, no one would answer. She knew that "Jesus, Jesus He's the man...If He can't do it, nobody can!"...She kept on, keeping on...You and I need to be as persistent in our praying...Praying that says, "Lord I know only you can help me with this,...only you can solve this problem...so I'm not giving up...I'm gonna pray and pray until you give me an answer."...And He will...in His time...He may not always make our situation better, but He will give us the strength and courage to bear it...to get through it.

A few years ago, there was a story all over the local news about a Rochester woman who woke up after being in a coma for almost two years. As she and her family were leaving the hospital, a TV reporter asked the woman's mother, "Over the last two years the doctors have been telling you there was no hope for your daughter...that she would never wake up...How did you resist the temptation to pull the plug and end all the suffering?"...I remember the big smile on her face as the mother graciously answered that reporter's insensitive question, "We just kept on praying," she said, "Just kept waitin' on the Lord. We kept waitin' on the Lord." ...Non-stop praying...never giving up on the Lord...Keep knocking at the door,...Trust in His promise: "Ask and you shall receive...Knock and the door will be opened to U."...That, my friends, is the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ today. AMEN.