

20th (QA&SJ) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

You and I have probably felt fear when confronted with situations that might beat us—illness, joblessness, family problems, rejection, loneliness, depression and so on. We hurdle the situation in various ways and we struggle to avoid being crushed by adversity. Often our attempts to escape problems leave us with nothing but anxiety and stress. We feel alone with our dilemma. Oftentimes we fail to believe that God has a plan to guide us and bring us to a better situation. This Sunday St. Matthew continues to demonstrate Jesus' unlimited power to heal and presents to us faith that survives hard times. Perhaps in contrast to the little faith of Peter, shown in last Sunday's gospel, an extraordinary amount of faith the Canaanite woman reveals. Her trust surprises even Jesus. His rough response surprises us.

How strong is your faith in times of adversity? Do not fear the winds of adversity. Remember: A kite rises against the wind rather than with it! When Jesus tests her faith by following-up His reply with harsh words the woman is not intimidated. *“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs”* (It was common for the Jews to refer to the Gentiles as dogs.) In effect, she says with a smile, *“Couldn't you slip a little food to me, just as little children slip food to their pet dog when their parents are not looking?”* There is only one

instance in the gospels when Jesus loses an argument to someone. It is the Canaanite woman in our Gospel who betters Him in their exchange. And she wins not because she is smarter, but because of her strong faith. She cleverly turns the refusal to her own advantage, and points out that even the dogs get the table scraps. She doesn't take no for an answer. She acknowledges the rights and privileges of the children of Israel, but she also asserts the need for the Gentiles to have access to Jesus' *divine healing and salvation*. She acknowledges her littleness and great need for God, even a poor and despised pagan woman such as she could also benefit of the divine bounty. She illustrates her belief that Jesus is the Messiah, calling Him 'Lord' and 'Son of David.' In the end Jesus rewards her persistent prayer and heals her daughter immediately from a distance. The point seems to be that all who call on the Lord with faith, even the despised Gentiles, can be saved.

Undoubtedly our own faith wavers between these extremes— one day we believe God cannot possibly hear our prayers. The level of difficulty in our situations makes us feel ready to be crushed under the foot of our adversity. Other times we trust God with our hopes and aspirations, with our very lives. *What is great faith? First, it is not about the doctrines we know. Faith is when we have nothing left and no other recourse, and in desperation we cling fast and call out to our God.* Great faith is when God is all we've got and we wait for scraps

from his banquet. Then we realize God comes down with a feast for us. *Second*, faith is when we are called a dog we continue to act like a human being, refusing to go down to the level of those who belittle or want to silence us. Great faith is when we continue to believe in our cause against all odds. *Third*, faith is when we keep hoping. When we will do anything for a loved one. When we sincerely believe in the goodness of our God and when we firmly believe that goodness will triumph. Great faith is when we do not give in to easy solutions and despair.

Faith is a journey. In life we have our desperate moments and urgent needs. We can worry and fret and be over-anxious but do not lose heart. Arm your life with this virtue. Remember the Israelites wandered a lifetime...we don't need to spend 40 years in the desert just to learn this. God allows us a lifetime to deepen our own faith, reaching out to us all the while. *Feed your faith and your fears will starve to death!* Trust him at all times. *Persistence pays.* Do not doubt the miracle of constancy and insistence. Even hard rock will crack at the continued drop of soft water. The hardest of hearts has a soft spot that will weep at the plea of a small voice. *Persistence* is not only about stubborn, repeated acts or about not losing hope. It is a brave attitude or humble courage that believes in one's capacity to appeal and in the mercy of the Almighty to listen. *Persistence* is living when hope is no

longer necessary because you believe in a caring God. Patience, they say, *is three-fourths of faith.*

“Lord, help me” three prayer words of the Canaanite woman, so simple, so personal and so profound yet moving and effective. This is how prayer should be. ***“Oh woman, great is your faith!”*** God welcomes all who believe in him, who ask for his mercy and seek to do his will. ***“A humble and contrite heart God will never spurn.”*** Let Jesus dwell in your heart. Ask with great faith and abundant graces will be given you. Amen!