

Homily 20th Sunday Year A 2023

One of the endearing features of Jesus was his ability and desire to respond to genuine appeals for help, even if it meant changing his mind. He responded to the obvious deep, deep love of a mother for her sick daughter.

The Servants of the Word write:

The Gospel, Matthew 15:21, describes the only occasion in which Jesus ministered outside of Jewish territory. (Tyre and Sidon were fifty miles north of Israel and still exist today in modern Lebanon.) A Gentile woman, a foreigner who was not a member of the Jewish people, 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. Maybe Jesus did this to test the woman, to awaken faith in her.

One of the phrases Jesus used was the expression of "throwing bread to the dogs"? The Jews often spoke of the Gentiles with arrogance and insolence as "unclean dogs" since the Gentiles did not follow God's law and were excluded from God's covenant and favour with the people of Israel. For the Greeks the "dog" was a symbol of dishonour and was used to describe a shameless and audacious woman. There is another reference to "dogs" in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus says to his disciples, "*Do not give to dogs what is holy*" (Matthew 7:6). It is possible that Jesus tests this woman's faith to see if she is earnest in receiving *holy things* from the hand of a holy God. Jesus, no doubt, spoke with a smile rather than with an insult because this woman immediately responds with wit and faith - "even the dogs eat the crumbs".

Jesus praises a Gentile woman for her faith and for her love. She made the misery of her child her own and she was willing to suffer rebuff in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had an indomitable persistence. It would seem that the woman's faith grew stronger in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with earnest faith - whether Jew or Gentile - was refused his help. Do you seek the Lord Jesus with expectant faith?

Pope Francis: "Children bring life, happiness, hope — and even troubles, but that's life. Obviously, they cause worries and sometimes problems, but a society with those worries and problems is always better than a society that is sad and grey because it has no children. With their interior simplicity, they have the ability to give and to receive tenderness. Children are able to smile and cry. Some, when I reach out to embrace them, smile. Others, seeing me dressed in white, think I'm a doctor who's come to vaccinate them and they cry. It's spontaneous. Children are like that.

Smile and cry — those are two things that older people often block. Many times, our smile is a cardboard smile, something without life, artificial like a clown's. Children smile spontaneously and they cry spontaneously. It's a matter of the heart, and adult hearts can be blocked and lose the ability to smile and to cry. Children, however, can teach us to smile and cry again!!