

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 20th Sunday Ordinary Year A1

A story is told about an old woman who was walking the aisles in the grocery one day and she saw a young man, and began to stare at him. He looked away embarrassed, but after turning back to see her still looking at him, he suspected something was wrong so he approached her. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry for staring at you, but when I am amazed at how you remarkably favor my youngest son, who passed away last year in car accident." "Oh", the young man said and they started a little conversation about her son's life and her situation now. After a couple minutes she said, "I didn't mean to take so much of your time, but I appreciate you taking a moment to talk." They both went back to shopping, until an aisle or two later they bumped into each other again getting closer to the check-out line. She hesitantly said, "I enjoyed so much talking with you and it brought back so many good memories of my son. Could I burden you with this last favor: it would mean so much to me, I am just going home to have lunch alone again. So, for old times' sake, when I finish up there, and turn and wave to you, will you please say "See you in a little bit, mom." The young man thought it was weird, but okay, why not, it means so much to her and it was no trouble to him. So, he went ahead and did it for her, and kept on moving through the line, until he was checking out and his few items totaled \$ 98.32 and he disgustedly commented how pricey everything was anymore, and the clerk said, "Oh no, you got a lot, that included your mom's order too!" What a clever lady to get her lunch paid for? But also, sometimes it takes a little while to truly size up what is going on in a situation!

For many people, today's gospel is a tough one to parse out: What is Jesus up to? I imagine some in His crowd, may think something is wrong with him today. The apostles, too? I don't know about them here. They may be what is wrong and what is behind Jesus' moodiness (if that is what it is). But in this case, I'm following and sticking with Jesus. First of all, what I am referring to here is that Jesus (*Usually He is always 'Mr Welcoming' – just think of how many times Jesus says "Come to me"-Mt 11:28, "Come follow me-Mt 4:19", "Come be my disciple Mt 16:24"*) well, here Jesus seems to almost snub, disregard or even reject the Canaanite woman. First, after she approaches and makes a request Jesus says nothing at all in return – a type of silent treatment (*and we know how hurtful that can be – not to even be acknowledged - for example, it would be fine if you want to say no to me, okay I can deal with it & I know where you*

stand- I'll accept it and move on) But, Matthew 15:23 tells us that "Jesus did not say a word in answer to her." He doesn't even acknowledge her! Then, after the disciples goad him along with the suggestion 'Get rid of her- put her out'. Jesus only says that his mission is to start at home, with him being sent only to save the lost sheep of Israel (*She is an outsider-a Canaanite, that makes her a historical enemy of Israel- as we remember the whole fight over the land as Joshua and the Israelites after Moses' death, push into Canaan and get a piece-take over the Promised Land through war, so her being a Canaanite makes her a big time outsider=one of 'THEM'*). And finally, after all of that cold treatment, she throws in one more pleading request, and Jesus says, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the **dogs**" (Matt 15:26) What? Even if you charitably translate that word in the sense of 'puppy house-pets' instead of 'junk-yard dog', it is still offensive! Isn't calling someone a dog bad enough that you are seeing them as not 'family', but not even 'human'!

So, is Jesus giving in to cultural prejudice and race-based name calling of those different from 'us'? Well, I suggest that there is a lot (a lot) of nuance and subtlety going on here. There would be a lot of sideways glancing (maybe even winking) going on in this encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. A lot more is going on between them in this interaction than we would pick up on if we were only eavesdropping on it in the corner market. It does seem like Jesus is falling into cultural prejudices divide people into 'us vs them', until we remember who we are dealing with? This is Jesus. He who came to bring together again, reconciling the human family, He who came to save us all and taught us to even love our enemies. So, something more is going on here, and I am sticking with Jesus on this one. He knows what He is up to. I find that He is actually not only giving this strong woman of faith a platform to display her 'great faith' but also He is using this episode as a 'teaching moment' for His own apostles. I suggest that is who Jesus is really after pulling in, this morning is the apostles (He is addressing them!) How do I get this? Or what leads me to suggest this reading of the room? First, remember who we are dealing with? This is Jesus-the all-inclusive Savior, who knows the hearts of those He is talking to (*Very similarly, Jesus will have a parallel encounter to this one in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well! There He is also teaching His apostles more about His Self and Mission in addition to healing the woman's past*).

So, Jesus knows this Canaanite woman's faith- He is going to heal her daughter and He knows that nothing is going to deter her from clinging to him – she is not ever going to give up (partly because he knows she knows who HE is-

that is her faith, but He also knows she is driven by a mother's love (*Get out of her way-a mother's love will do anything, endure any-thing for the sake of her child*) He knows she is sticking with him. So, I find that Jesus' real target here, is the apostles. What seems like a rejection of woman is in fact Jesus embracing her, and what seems like her put-down turns out to be her raising up-elevation. Jesus commends her faith (Matt 15:28 "**Great is your faith!**" - that is second in the list of Jesus' top praises of other people's faith- second only to the Centurion in Matthew 8:10 where Jesus says, "Amen, I say, *in no one in Israel have I found such faith*") It takes an outsider to show up our own lack of faith. To further prove that Jesus' real target (if he is putting anyone down, it is his own disciples, but not putting down- He is putting them in their place – Jesus will say several times (5) of his own apostles, "Ye of little faith". - We just heard Him tell Peter that last week when Peter failed his water-walk in Matt 14:3 (*Jesus says it 4 other times to them in Matt 6:30, 8:26, 16:8 & 17:20*) Keep in mind, that it was not Jesus' suggestion that the woman 'go away'. The disciples pushed that one. And unfortunately, they are known to do that? Remember when the kids went to Jesus, and the apostles were sending them away in Matt 19:13-14, Jesus rebuked apostles there saying, "Let the children come..." And again with the poor blind Bartimaeus, in Mark 10:28, the apostles and the crowd try to shut him down, silencing him, until Jesus intervenes and reaches out to Bartimaeus. So, I think Jesus and the woman have something going here-Jesus is using this encounter for more than we think at first (*absolutely using it to heal her daughter, but also to confirm the woman's salvation in Him-even being outsider*). Jesus is also breaking through the apostles' religious sense of superiority, their cultural bigotry or outright racism. This is a learning moment for them to 1) awaken to the fact that their faith needs to step up (it takes an outsider to show them what they have) and 2) that God's plan of inclusion of all people into his kingdom is bigger than their own ideas or their geographical boundary lines. So, this encounter is meant more for them! They have a seat at the table but are they appreciating it? She is happy and content to simply stand by outside faithfully, (putting up with who knows what!) just to get opportunity to graze around their feet and pick up scraps! **Now that is faith!** Nothing can keep her from Jesus. She might ask us today, if we appreciate the seat we have at Jesus' table? Do we stick in there with Him, when things don't seem to go our way? When others may seem to get ahead of us? She faithfully stays right there with Him? Do we?