

St Pius-St Anthony 20th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Provocative sayings! I imagine everyone here has lived long enough to say that we've all seen & heard testy exchanges in a heated crowd, like after a bump 'You want some of this', or a loose word taken wrong way 'you got something to say to me?', or someone staring at somebody, 'Did you lose something over here?' or after being asked a rude question, "What, are you writing a book?" Those are provocative comments. It might seem that we are overhearing that in today's gospel. I think the best approach to the understanding the verbal sparring we overhear today between Jesus and the Canaanite Woman, is to think of it as what we call a 'gentle jerking of one's chain' or good hearted argument among friends. But, there is another level to this dialogue and it is asking "Just who is talking to whom?" Because if we think this exchange is only between Canaanite woman and Jesus, we are missing a lot of Jesus' plan here. Here's why: First, always keep in mind who we are dealing with--Jesus, our shepherd who reads/knows our hearts. Jesus knows us, before we even say a word; before we even approach him. He knows this Canaanite woman's faith is stronger than anyone else's in that crowd that day (we'll see, even stronger than his own apostles); He wasn't going to lose her by anything he said. She knew her Savior; somehow, she knew where to go, who to go to. Even as a Canaanite! Secondly, after she calls out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented" (15:22), then verse 23 says. "Jesus did not say a word in answer to her." *Jesus didn't respond.* Is that what we would call a 'pregnant pause' or an *expectant silence*. Yes, something else is coming here from Jesus. Wait for it

So, Jesus doesn't respond He knows her faith, He knows He has her. But his overambitious apostles jump out ahead of him (which we know where that leads, right? Remember when Peter got ahead of Jesus, and suggested to Him, how He should run His own passion and ministry. Jesus told him 'Get behind me Satan' (Mt 16:23). A very similar dynamic is going on here. The apostles at this time don't have any ground to stand on to justify 'dismissing anyone'-unless they are putting themselves out. Remember their doubting about Jesus pulling off the miracle feeding of the crowds (We only have 5 loaves, 2 fish-send them away), or what of their terror and doubt in the boat-sea walking episode (Peter had to reboot-reski-his faith after failing his water walk). So the apostles haven't recently been great at 'modeling faith to others. This is why they don't look too good in this reading, telling Jesus (again) to send her away-run off this poor woman-Don't they have a tendency to run off people --recall the children they want

to send away (Matt 19:13). But even more, I like how the gospel reading highlights the selfishness and self-importance the apostles feel about themselves. Look back, the reading verses 22-23, she calls out to Jesus, "Lord, have pity on me, Son of David" and the apostles complain 'she keeps calling out after **us** send her away'. Us-she addressed Jesus. But, confronting this narrow egoism of the apostles is what Jesus is after. He is teaching them to open up, don't rule out God working through outsiders. Deep faith can be found in someone, seemingly 'outside the fold'. After the apostles suggest tossing her out, Jesus then starts talking with her, to draw out and showcase her exemplary faith. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (v.24)." Okay, here He is saying here that even those closest to him (in his house) can be lost. Understand that as Him saying, 'even my own apostles can be lost'. I think He is saying to her, 'Keep up with me-(with a wink)-I'm working on them too.'" So, she comes right back, "But Lord help me"(v.25) and she does Him homage-kneeling before Him! (Apostles will get around to this at Transfiguration but haven't yet- chp 17). To which Jesus says, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs"(vs.26) Before you come unglued about Jesus' namecalling 'dog', keep in mind that he just called his 'own' 'lost sheep'. I'm sure we've heard that 'sheep' is not the most flattering term, and add to it, 'lost'. At least the dog knows where he is, or can get around on his own. But the sweetest, wisest comment in this whole exchange comes from her. I wish I could have said it. She comes back, "But, Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the master's table." She is saying, "I am okay even being a dog in the master's house, if that is what it takes to be saved." Her response makes me think of Psalm 84:10 "Better one day in your courts, than a thousand elsewhere." Better to be a dog in Lord's house, than a show horse in the king's palace. She means "I can accept anything, as long as it means I am with you." That is faith! She is not discouraged. She is not silenced, she does not slink away. She knows Jesus, He is her redeemer. She stays with Him to the end. Say what you will, I know you can heal my daughter-And Jesus does!

What does Jesus do? Praises her faith! His last statement says it all" "O woman, great is your faith!"(vs.28). At different times, Jesus does praise the faith of outsiders as worthy examples of trusting belief. In Matt 8:10 after a Centurion approaches Him for his slave's healing, Jesus even says of him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." (Is this same centurion of Matt 27:54 who claims, "Truly, this was the Son of God!") So here too, Jesus praises her 'dogged' faith (Matthew 15:28-'great is your faith!'). Is ours as strong? Do we practice faith 'in the crowd' and 'out of the

crowd'? Maybe at first, she didn't understand what/why Jesus was saying what he was? But she still stayed at his heels. Is our faith strong enough to stay with Jesus, when things are not understood by us or even when we feel 'pushed back' or 'dismissed'? Jesus does know us. He knows his flock and his flock obviously has 'sheep-dogs' in it. Is our faith strong enough to keep with Him?