

Pentecost 11 8/20/17
Matthew 15:21-28 15A

“LORD, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!”

“We walk by faith, not by sight,” Paul says (2 Cor 5:7). Or, perhaps to say it more fittingly and accurately – we are supposed to, we should walk by faith, but do we always? When the cross gets heavy and our way becomes dark, are we more inclined to walk by our reason, our doubts, the emotion and feeling of the moment, than our faith?

Our Gospel presents to us a true example of firm and perfect faith. The Canaanite woman in our Gospel lesson teaches us the true way and virtue of faith, namely, that faith is the trust in the grace and goodness of God as revealed through His Word.

This Canaanite woman was tested by God, she struggled with Him, and, in the midst of disappointment and despite facing opposition at every turn, she refused to give up or give in. Our Gospel reading teaches us that we must ever remember that nothing is to keep us from calling upon the Lord and holding Him to His Word, even when He appears to be against us and when His answer is "No."

You may have noticed that HELPLESSNESS has been the theme of our readings from the Evangelist Matthew these past Sundays. When Jesus withdrew to a desolate place, the crowd followed Him and evening came, so Jesus instructed the disciples, “You give them something to eat”. HELPLESSNESS! Last week, “He made the disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side”. As they sailed, the boat was “beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them”. HELPLESSNESS!

You know helplessness; you’ve felt it. The stock market free falls and your mutual fund, your retirement savings, seemingly disappear in a single

day. You walk into the hospital room and there your child lies. You stand at the graveside to say good-bye to your spouse of 50 or 60 years, now having to face life alone after those many years. All of your life you've been that rugged individual who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, now infirmity has robbed you of mobility and strength so that you cannot even put on your own shoes, let alone live in your own home. You've seen your dream home filled with flood water. The harvest is under way, but the drought of this past summer means there's not a lot to harvest.

HELPLESSNESS – we know it all too well in this vale of tears. And, we pray and pray, and it seems to our human reason and emotion that God has turned a deaf ear to us.

This Canaanite woman knew helplessness. What hope did this woman have? She was a sinner, and she knew it. She was not a Jew, and she knew it. She had a demon-possessed daughter and she could do nothing about it. But, she had one other thing -- the Word of God. That Word taught her that Jesus, the Lord, the Son of David, had mercy on sinners.

In our Gospel, Jesus holds before the disciples and us the faith of this Canaanite woman. Jesus is teaching us that the only way to come to Him is by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

“Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district to Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from the region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon’”.

This woman had heard the Good News about Jesus. The Good News of Jesus' mercy had spread through Tyre. In the 10th chapter of Romans, Paul teaches us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing

through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17). She had heard. And that word had created faith. She came to Christ in faith.

The Evangelist Matthew records for us, the Son of David’s response to her plea, “He did not answer her a word”.

It appears to our human reason that He is unwilling to answer this woman's simple and pious request. Jesus said,

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matt 7:7-8).

She asked, but did not receive. She sought, but did not find. She knocked, but far from being opened, the door seemed locked to her prayers.

When He spoke, He said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. It is true, Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the Israel, the Jews. But, it was always God's desire and plan that Christ would be the Savior of the nations, Jews and Gentiles. Even though He came first to the Jews, it did not mean that He will cast away the Gentiles who come to Him in faith.

This poor woman does not give up. By faith, she believes all she had heard of Jesus. She clings to the Word she had heard of Jesus. Once more she intercedes on behalf of her daughter, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus replied to her with the words of a popular proverb of the Jews of Jesus’ day, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs”. Jesus was not insulting her. The word Jesus uses here is that of a loved, cared for, household pet. When, the woman hears Jesus call her that, she knows she has him where she wants Him. She does not despair, but agrees with His judgment and concedes that before Almighty God, she deserves no special place, only the love and care that a beloved household

pet deserves. She desires no more than a household pet is entitled to, namely, that she may eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the Lord.

“We walk by faith, not by sight.” Dear Saints of God, our lesson this Sunday teaches us that we dare not think of God according to our human reason, our doubts, the emotion of the moment. God’s ways are not our ways. When it seems to our reason and emotions that God has turned a deaf ear to us, abandoned us, forsaken us, perhaps even when it would seem to us that God is a most cruel tyrant, perhaps even one who delights in our misery and tears, then we must turn in FAITH to trust in the promises of His Word, “‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer 29:11).

In the midst of things we cannot understand – when our helplessness is all too obvious to us – faith clings to the love of God in Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son”. In the midst of things we cannot understand by our human reason, in faith we know Jesus died on the cross because God does not want us to die. We know that death is swallowed up forever by the Easter resurrection of Jesus so that death has no sting and the grave has no victory over us. Faith trusts, “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” (Ro 8:32).

When we feel our prayers go unanswered, even unheard, let us learn from this Canaanite woman. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you” (Ps 50:15). When it seems to our reason and emotion that God has closed His heart and ears to our cries for mercy, then we must turn away from our human wisdom and feeling to lay hold of God as He has made Himself known to us in His Word. God has commanded us to pray to

Him – especially in our helplessness – with the sure and certain promise that He will hear us! He will answer us – deliver us – according to His plan in the way He knows best, according to His timetable. As we wait for His deliverance, He will give us strength, patience; He will cast out all fear.

In the weakness of our human nature, when it seem that God has closed His heart and His ears to our cries for mercy and our prayers -- when we think God's silence is a "no" -- we must turn from this feeling and lay hold and retain the "yes" of god's Word and promise, even when our doubts, fear, and feelings cause us to think God is ignoring us. We walk by faith and faith always trusts that God has mercy on us all.