

Reflection for the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time

On this 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time, our Gospel reading is taken from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 12 verses 21 thru 28. It is in this reading from Matthew that we hear about a woman who is a Canaanite, approaching Jesus and asking him to heal her daughter who is possessed by a demon. The disciples ask Jesus to send the woman away, but the woman pleads with Jesus to help her. Jesus responds by saying “it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” This response by Jesus does not deter the woman who is asking for Jesus to help her daughter, she responds by saying “please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.” In the end Jesus grants the woman’s request and heals her daughter.

From first glance at this Gospel reading we can see that this Canaanite woman has faith, humility and determination. This woman that approaches Jesus and His disciples is not going to be easily turned away, for she has that rare combination of virtues that enables her to be a formidable person but at the same time a true believer. This Canaanite woman has a faith that enables her to know who Jesus is and what He could do for her daughter. Out of a mother’s love for her child she approaches Jesus looking for help not for her but her daughter who is tormented by a demon. It is her faith that compels her to seek Jesus out, she does not come to Jesus with hope or curiosity, she knows who He is and what He is capable of doing. She is truly and woman of faith that is guided and directed by her faith.

Humility is another one of the virtues or qualities that the Canaanite woman possess, for when the disciples try to convince Jesus to send the woman away, she takes no offence. In fact, when Jesus compares the Canaanite people to a dog, the woman not only takes no offence, but she uses the comparison to make her case that Jesus should help her daughter. This is not a woman motivated by pride but rather she is motivated by faith in Jesus and love for her daughter. Clearly this is a humble woman that is seeking help from the Lord. She does not come forward demanding help but rather she requests help with a humble heart.

Even though the woman in our Gospel reading this Sunday is a woman of faith and has a humble heart, these two virtues do not prevent her from being a very determined person as she seeks help for her daughter. It might be possible that her faith and humility helped her be more determined than if she did not have faith and humility. It is not that the Canaanite woman will not take no for an answer, in fact Jesus and the disciples never say no to her, they rather appear more interested in other matters and needs than the request that the woman presents to them. The woman is determined to get a yes or a no to her request she is not interested in being brushed off or getting the cold shoulder. She is looking for the yes or no and is determined to get her request answered in a definitive way.

The faith, humility and determination of the Canaanite woman as she seeks help for her daughter can and should speak to us as followers of Jesus. As followers of Christ we can all see how important faith and humility are for us. These are two virtues that are important for us to embrace as we follow Jesus in this world, looking forward to the ever-lasting Kingdom. But may we also see the importance of embracing the virtue of determination. The Canaanite woman was able to allow her faith and humility to speak to Jesus because of her determined nature. It was her determination that provided her with the opportunity to humbly make her request to Jesus. If she was not as determined as she was, the Canaanite woman would have accepted the brush off or the cold shoulder that was first given to her by the disciples and Jesus. It was her determined drive that enabled her to show her faith and humility to Jesus that enabled Him to grant her request.